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Red Steel 2 • Punch-Out!! • Spore Hero
The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks
MySims Agents • The Legendary Starfy

242
JUNE 2009
SUBSCRIBER EDITION

TEEN
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CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

Blood
Mild Language
Violence

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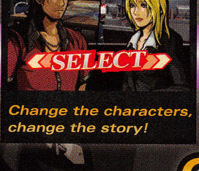
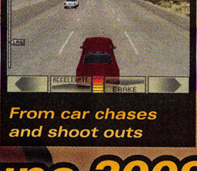

LAW
SARA
TRANSMITTER
OK
UPDATE CASEFILE
SELECT

SARA
Miami PD
Monitoring Law's Case
PDA Updates

Change the characters, change the story!

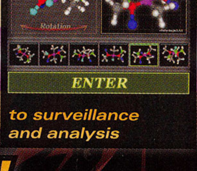
Sara
Law is in danger! I need to take out Antonio.

Terrorist conspiracy


LAW
32.94
ACCELERATE
BRAKE

Law
We need to floor it!

From car chases and shoot outs


Rotation
ENTER

Sara
(...I've got a bad feeling.)

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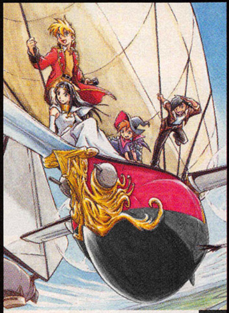
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NINTENDO POWER

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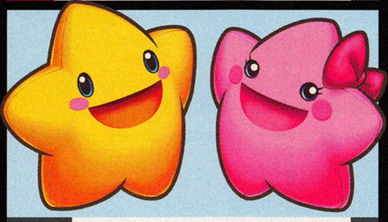
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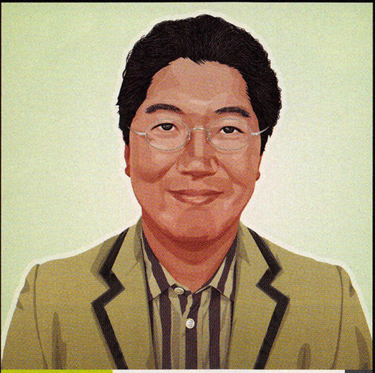
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DS = NINTENDO DS
SNES = SUPER NES
VC = VIRTUAL CONSOLE
Wii = Wii
WW = WiiWare
DW = DSiWare

NEWS 🟥
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Pulse

Second Revolution

Chris Slate

Just as the Wii Remote and Nunchuk controllers changed gaming when the Wii console launched, the Wii MotionPlus accessory is set to trigger a similar leap forward this June. We recently tested the new Wii Remote add-on with several upcoming games, and trust us: it's the real deal. In titles like June's Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10 and the holiday-timed Red Steel 2 (on pgs. 28 and 44, respectively), the enhanced connection to the on-screen action is amazing.

On a less-thrilling note, I must tell you that we are no longer able to offer regular monthly sweepstakes. We still plan to give you occasional chances to win prizes (hopefully bigger and better ones), but we won't have a monthly section.

Switching back to positive developments, we'll have a huge cover story next month on a game that many of our letter-writers have been dying for (turn to pg. 96 and be happy).

CHRIS SLATE **EDITOR IN CHIEF**

Wii
Punch-Out!!
9-PAGE BLOWOUT: We beat the game and it's a knockout!
NINTENDO POWER
RESIDENT EVIL RETURNS TO Wii
THE NEXT BIG Wii ADVENTURE
WORLD EXCLUSIVE
WIN DSi
SILENT HILL
SHATTERED MEMORIES
The survival-horror classic is reborn on Wii
Future

V241 **MAY 2009**

Chris Slate here, back once again to answer your letters while taking a break from delivering justice with cold steel. But first, this month's special letter request: in what ways could the new Wii MotionPlus accessory potentially enhance your favorite games? Send your responses to the address on page 8, and we'll print the best ones!

LETTERS

KNOCKED OUT

HOLY COW! The new Punch-Out!! looks like it could top even Brawl as the best fighting game. (OK, maybe not, but still....) As a Wii Sports Boxing pro, it looks like I'm gonna have a whole new way to dish out damage to my friends and family. And with King Hippo in the game, a Best Boss award should be created for the 2009 NP Awards. Punch-Out!!, Klonoa, The Conduit.... Will wonders never cease? **—DON FLAMENCO**

LET'S-A FIGHT!

Mario has had many occupations: a doctor, a kart racer, a player of many sports, and even a villain (in Donkey Kong Jr.). But the one role that he wasn't any good at was being a referee in the original NES Punch-Out!! He allowed a lot of foul play, such as punching Soda Popinski while he's taking a drink, and allowing Popinski to drink during a fight at all. Mario is not a good role model for refs.
—(NO NAME GIVEN)

Are you kidding? Mario was the best! So what if he wouldn't halt a match when King Hippo's trunks fell down, or when Great Tiger teleported around the ring—the plumber gave the fans what they wanted!

FIRST-CLASS FREEBIE

I just received my copy of Game & Watch Collection from Club Nintendo, and was wondering what you guys might rate the game if it was available to the general public. I think it's pretty solid; the three simple games that come in the collection stay true to the original Game & Watch handhelds. The coolest thing about the game is probably its value as a collector's item; it's nice to know that Nintendo really rewards its loyal customers. **—ROMAN B.**

It would be impossible to score Game & Watch Collection on the same scale that we use for more robust, modern games, but I'd say the title is a must-have for dedicated Nintendo fans. It's a fantastic collector's item and a nostalgic reminder of pre-NES Nintendo gaming, and the simple-yet-addictive games still hook me from time to time. It's easily the jewel in Club Nintendo's crown.

ALL ABOARD

The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks looks so cool! I've been waiting for the next Zelda game ever since Phantom Hourglass came out. I was hoping it would be on Wii, but the train idea is creative, and—after all—it's a Zelda game. I can't wait to learn about the new story, characters, tools, and weapons. I am *so* psyched about this game—I hope it turns out to be as good as I think it will! **—AUSTIN S.**

I was psyched to see the DSiWare game coverage and sharp-looking new Download section in Vol. 241. Since I take my Nintendo DSi handheld everywhere, I plan to spend way too much money at the Nintendo DSi Shop. Keep the downloadable-game coverage coming! **—JESS C.**

You got it, Jess! I know what you mean about getting caught up in shopping for DSiWare—with low price points and limitless storage space via SD cards, I sense a new addiction coming on!

DOWNLOAD

Flip the Heck Out!

One of the first DSiWare titles, Mighty Flip Champs, puts a new spin on puzzle-platforming.

ONE HAPPY CAMPER

I just want to say that the Nintendo DSi is a work of art, and is the best handheld created by Nintendo! I bought one on April 5th to replace my old DS Lite (it lived a good three years until it met Guitar Hero On Tour: Decades) and I can't put it down. The camera feature is unique (I can't stop using it) and the sound features are just plain fun. Excellent job, Nintendo—keep up the great work! **—THEWORLDENDSWITHME**

MAKING MEMORIES

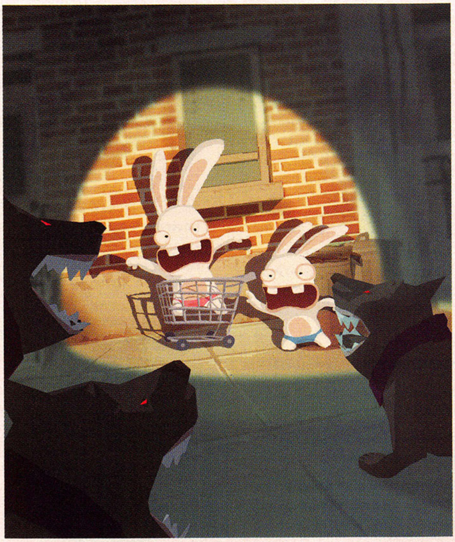
What if, using the Nintendo DSi, you could take pictures of your games while you play? The shots could go into a kind of scrapbook on the system's start-up menu where you could give them titles, captions, play with them, etc. **—EMERY B.**

I probably have an unhealthy enthusiasm for taking game screens since I work at NP, but I love the idea of creating keepsakes from game experiences and collecting them as years go by.

RABBIDS, GO HOME—SERIOUSLY!

When I read last month's preview of Ubisoft's Rabbids Go Home, I was in a state of pure joy and incredible shock. I was thrilled to hear that the Rabbids will finally see some action that doesn't involve numerous minigames, but my shock came from the fact that Rayman wasn't present in any of the game's screens or artwork. I'm beginning to feel that Ubisoft is losing its real mascot, and that perhaps we will never see him again. I hope this isn't true, as Rayman has starred in some of the best platformers of our generation. No offense to the Rabbids, but Rayman could crush those furry freaks any day of the week if he had a new game all to himself. I still think Rabbids Go Home will be a fantastic adventure, but I'm a bit disgusted at Ubisoft for ditching its best video game star.
—HARLEY SCHAFFER

While there aren't currently any concrete plans for a new Rayman game, Michel Ancel—the genius game designer that created the character—has expressed a desire to make a new game for the limbless one someday. So don't give up hope, Harley—there's a good chance you'll get to see Rayman in action again!


Even though fan-favorite Ubisoft hero Rayman doesn't star in Rabbids Go Home, don't count this brilliant-looking Wii-exclusive action-platform game out for a second.

DON'T HASSLE THE HOFF

In Vol. 239's Sonic and the Black Knight review, Chris H. said that we have seen hedgehogs with guns and hedgehogs who can morph, but that we have never seen them with swords. That is false. In Shadow the Hedgehog, you can unlock a samurai sword. **—SAMIDUDE**

THE HOFF SAYS: Au contraire, Samidude! I never claimed there were no hedgehogs with swords prior to Sonic and the Black Knight. In fact, I know quite the opposite to be true. A group of sword-wielding Western European hedgehogs (scientific name Erinaceus europaeus) led an armed revolt in New Zealand in the 1920s, and a small band of hedgehogs reportedly fought alongside William Wallace in the 13th century. I was also chased by an angry hedgehog with a sword after disturbing a herd of cattle in Colorado in the mid '90s, but the out-of-court settlement won't allow me to divulge any further details about that.

> I would love it if a new Star Fox game were in the works, and Wii would be a perfect fit for the series. But I'm not sure that's possible after the endings in Star Fox Command—some of them made me wonder if the series will continue.
>
> —METALWOLF

WHAT GAME SERIES WOULD YOU LOVE TO SEE COME BACK?

Donkey Kong hasn't gotten much love recently, and I think that should change. The Super NES Donkey Kong Country games were awesome; I'd really like to see Donkey Kong Country 4 sometime soon. —**LUISLUIGIB.**

It's gotta be Kid Icarus! I know that's the game that everyone is going to ask for, but it's true. The series has been dangled in front of our noses like a piece of candy for years! Super Smash Bros. Brawl gave Pit a sweet new design, and so many people would love to see him back in action. —**KYLE S.**

I want to see Kid Icarus return in an action-RPG similar to Zelda. Since Pit made his comeback in Super Smash Bros. Brawl, fans have been waiting for him to star in a new game. —**EMIMAC**

I'd like to see a sequel to Yoshi's Story in which you hold the Wii Remote sideways like an NES pad. If the game was more challenging than Yoshi's Story, I'd be the first in line to buy it. —**(NO NAME GIVEN)**

How about Ice Climbers for Wii? You could use two Wii Remotes, with each acting as an ice axe for climbing. This idea could also work on the DS by holding a stylus in each hand! —**NINTENDOFREAK**

All I can think about is a Wii remake of Duck Hunt! It could play the same as before, but with a bigger arsenal of weapons, including grenades, sniper rifles, and nukes. Maybe you could draw your own backgrounds using the Wii Remote. And last but not least, the game could let us punish that giggling dog. —**SPENCER**

I would be eternally grateful for a new installment in the Rayman series. The franchise had so much promise, but it seems like Rayman all but dried up when his little Rabbid buddies took the world by storm. If Ubisoft could make a new Rayman game similar to Rayman 2: The Great Escape, that would be awesome. —**HYPO POWER**

The number-one franchise that I want revisited is Earthworm Jim. I just love the series' surreal, off-beat humor and quirky characters (Bob the Killer Goldfish? Classic.) and its freakishly awesome music and difficulty. My second choice would be the Ogre Battle series; it's been a while since we had one of those. —**FORCEOFNATURE26**

I feel that ol' Chibi-Robo should come back for another cleaning mission, with all-new tools to go along with his old ones. I just loved the first game, and I was easily hooked on the sequel. It's been a year, and now I want to see the little guy on Wii, even if it's a remake of the GameCube original. Chibi is one of those Nintendo greats that belongs in a future Super Smash Bros. game. I'm rooting for you, little dude! Kick butt and take heart points!

—**(NO NAME GIVEN)**

I had a blast playing Super Mario RPG on the Super NES; the story, characters, and gameplay were great. Nintendo and Square Enix should reteam to create a sequel, or at least remake the old one. With so many new characters having joined the Mario franchise since the last game, a new Super Mario RPG could include a bigger cast with more special skills and attacks. —**D-GUY**

Great choices! I'll add the NES classic (in my mind, anyway) Pro Wrestling. I haven't forgotten you, Fighter Hayabusa!

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Don't send links to game coverage on the Web—trust us; we see it all.

Don't ask about the status of upcoming games, or whether certain games will be announced; if we have that info, we'll always tell you.

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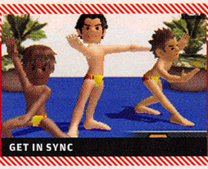
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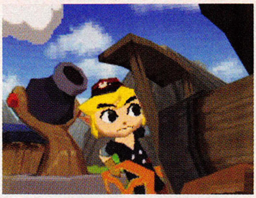
WILEY HERO

Full Steam Ahead

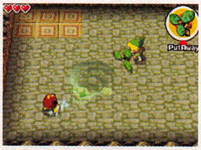
Link will be riding the Hyrule rails in his latest DS adventure, tentatively titled The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks.

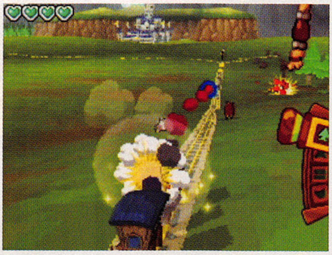


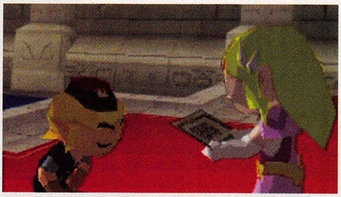
Nintendo President Satoru Iwata ended his GDC keynote address not with a bang, but with a steam whistle. What seemed to be a trailer for a new game about trains took an unexpected turn when Link popped out of the locomotive wearing a black conductor's cap in place of his floppy green beanie. It isn't clear how Link's new steam-powered locomotive will be integrated into his latest adventure for the Nintendo DS system, but the trailer showed scenes with a network of tracks on the upper screen and a variety of touch-screen train controls on the lower one. Link never touched the throttle in the demo footage, but he pulled a train whistle to scatter cows from the tracks and blasted at fouler beasts with a mounted cannon. No clue yet if he'll be laying the tracks personally or simply using them to speed around Hyrule.

What is clear is that Spirit Tracks will deliver another heaping helping of Zelda-style puzzle dungeons, featuring the same Wind Waker-inspired visuals and touch-screen controls as Link's most recent adventure, The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass. The footage revealed that the well-received touch-screen boomerang will return, and showed off a new item that resembles a handheld electric fan with blades made out of Deku leaves. The fan fires small cyclones that can sweep enemies away, knock projectiles back at their throwers, and carry distant keys to more-accessible locations.

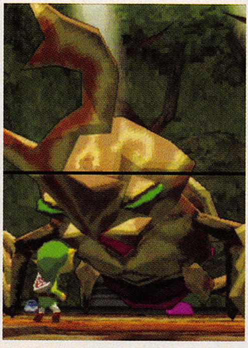
The indestructible Phantoms that guarded the Temple of the Ocean King will be returning in Spirit Tracks, but this time players can take control of the mighty automatons and guide them along movement paths drawn with the stylus. The trailer showed Link guiding the Phantoms through rings of fire to reach an otherwise-inaccessible switch, and having them attack a shielded foe from the front so that Link could strike from behind. Content to let the trailer speak for itself, Iwata offered no details beyond promising that the game would be available before the end of the year. **—CASEY L.**



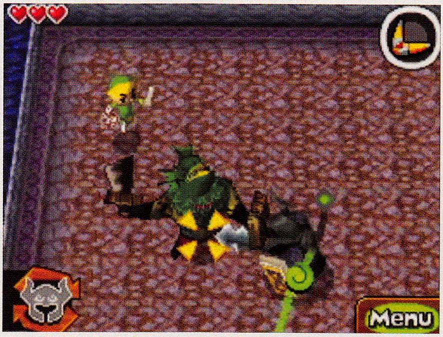


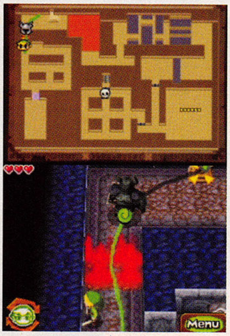


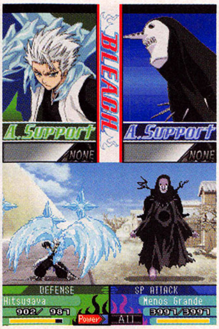
[Above] Is this the same Link and Zelda that we got to know in Phantom Hourglass, or all-new iterations?



As in the previous DS Zelda adventure, bosses tend to be big—*two screens* big.





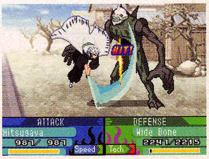

A. Support
BLEACH
A. Support
NONE
NONE
DEFENSE
Hitsugaya
902/ 987
Power
SP ATTACK
Menos Grande
3997/3997
All

Brains over Brawn

The Bleach franchise takes a more strategic tack in **Bleach: The 3rd Phantom** for Nintendo DS.

***Bleach* is a** manga/anime series that's all about combat—it seems as if protagonist Ichigo Kurosaki rarely takes a break from fighting foes, from the evil Hollows to other Soul Reapers. So it makes sense that the first two Nintendo DS games based on Ichigo's manga/anime adventures would be fighting games. But while both Bleach: The Blade of Fate and Bleach: Dark Souls were excellent, it doesn't hurt to have a little variety.

Obviously, publisher Sega and developer Tom Create agree: unlike its predecessors, Bleach: The 3rd Phantom is a turn-based strategy-RPG with an original story written by *Bleach* creator Tite Kubo. Long before Ichigo's time, two fraternal twins—Fujimaru and Matsuri Kudo—become Soul Reapers and fight alongside familiar characters such as Kaien Shiba and Sosuke Aizen. In fact, you have more than 50 playable characters to choose from as you assemble your up-to-eight-person team. Expect more on Bleach: The 3rd Phantom before the game's fall release. **—JUSTIN C.**


HIT!
ATTACK
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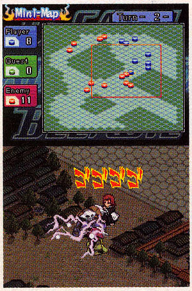
Mini-Map
Turn - 2 -
Player
8
Guest
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Enemy
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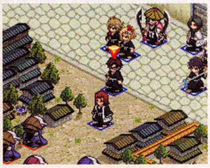
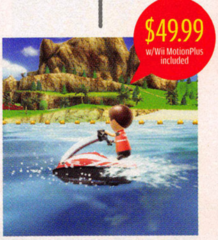


UPDATE

Wii MotionPlus accessory

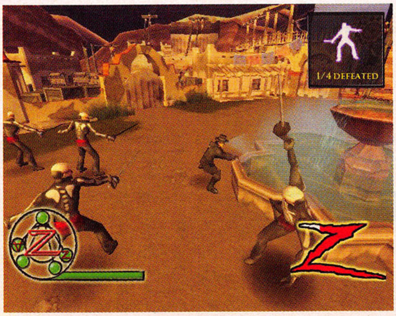
JUNE 8

+


$49.99
w/Wii MotionPlus included

Wii Sports Resort

JULY 26


1/4 DEFEATED
Z

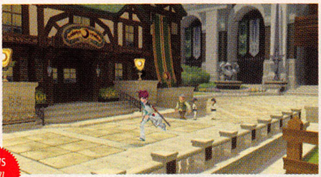
Zorro Lives!

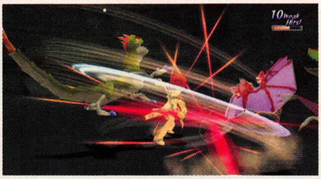
The masked desperado's long-awaited Wii debut is a destiny delayed, but not a destiny denied.

After disappearing for the two years following its early-2007 announcement, we were beginning to fear that Zorro had found his destiny at the bottom of a dumpster. But Zorro's fate does indeed lie in the Wii section of your local game store, where you'll find the Destiny of Zorro as a surprise spring release. The game features the renowned outlaw battling criminal gangs and an entire army of rebels in 19th-century Spanish California. Players will use both the motion-sensing and pointer features of the Wii Remote controller to manipulate Zorro's sword and whip, respectively. Zorro can pull himself up ledges by locking his whip onto marked targets, and swing across chasms by targeting poles and chandeliers. Zorro's blade can be swung with a flick of a wrist, and there are special moves that can be performed by—you guessed it—slashing out Zorro's signature Z. **—CASEY L.**

Crystal Clickers

The **Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: The Crystal Bearers** website is up, and thanks to the efforts of fans around the world, it's packed with strange and intriguing treats. Each unique visit to **www.thecrystalbearers.com** adds energy to a crystal on the main page, and when that fills up, a new preview unlocks. As of press time there are more than a dozen videos, most showing comical vignettes set in the game's world.



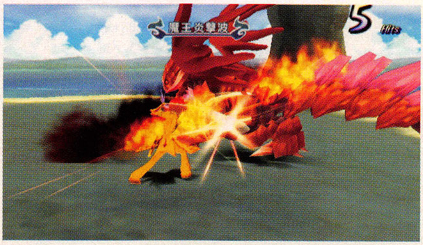


NEWS *from* JAPAN!

Grace under Dragonfire

Tales Studio's long-hinted-at follow-up to last year's Tales of Symphonia: Dawn of the New World has been revealed as a wholly original RPG epic titled **Tales of Graces**.

At an April 6th media conference held in their Tokyo headquarters, Namco Bandai delivered on their promise to bring the 10th original installment of the Tales franchise to the Wii console. Tales of Graces is set in a new world called Efinea, where 18-year-old hero Asbel Lhant is fighting to protect the people he loves from being enmeshed in a war between neighboring kingdoms.



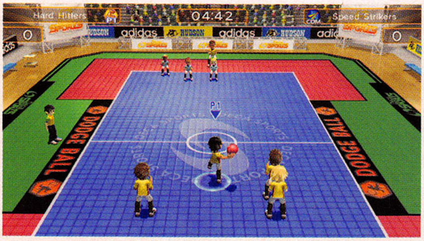
Tales of Graces will ditch the series' traditional hot-spots-on-a-map structure, and instead transition seamlessly from field areas to towns and dungeons. The battle system will also get a significant overhaul that aims to incorporate into the series some of the more advanced aspects of 3-D fighting games. For example, characters can shift fighting styles on the fly, with Asbel having a different move set depending on whether he's fighting defensively with his sword sheathed or offensively with the blade drawn. Tales of Graces is currently scheduled for a winter release in Japan, but a North American date has yet to be announced. —CASEY L.

The Power of 10

Tennis, ice hockey, and...synchronized swimming? Play all kinds of sports in **Deca Sports 2** for Wii.

With the news that publisher Hudson has shipped 2 million copies of Deca Sports worldwide, it should come as no surprise that there's a sequel on the way. Deca Sports 2 gives you 10 new games to play: mogul skiing, ice hockey, tennis, kendo, dodgeball, darts, speed skating, motorcycle road racing, synchronized swimming, and pétanque (which is kind of like the French version of bocce).

As with the first Deca Sports title, the games in Deca Sports 2 are easy to pick up and play. Tennis, for example, plays similarly to Wii Sports Tennis in that you swing the Wii Remote like a racket. But while you run to the ball automatically, Deca Sports 2 allows you to move toward and away from the net by pressing the A or B Buttons, respectively. Even better, Deca Sports 2 will support leaderboards and two-player versus via Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. Look for the game this fall. —JUSTIN C.

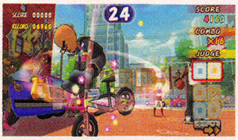


AQ Interactive Holds a Grudge

NEWS *from* JAPAN!

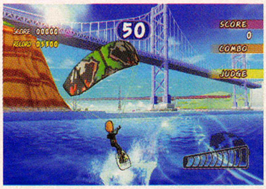
After helming both the original *Ju-on* film and its American remake, *The Grudge*, director Takashi Shimizu is bringing the franchise to Wii. Titled Feel the Fear: Ju-on, the game is a first-person horror title with the suddenly trendy Wii Remote-as-flashlight control scheme. AQ Interactive will be shipping the title in Japan this summer. No word yet on a US release.

Full Extension

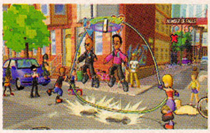


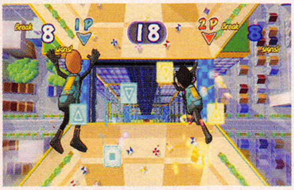
Up on your feet! **Active Life: Extreme Challenge** will have you moving and shaking your whole body.

When Active Life: Outdoor Challenge came out, the developers promised their unique exercise mat would not be another peripheral one-hit wonder. True to their word, Namco Bandai has another Active Life game in the works that uses the funky, Dance Dance Revolution-like pad for more heart-pumping fun. Combining fancy footwork and Wii Remote motions, Active Life: Extreme Challenge promises more, and more-interesting, challenges than before: try rock climbing, street luge, and base jumping, all from the safety of your living room. There are 15 events in all, each with various options, such as multiplayer and time-trial modes, to keep the up-tempo action going. Extreme Challenge will also let you use your Mii characters; we're not sure yet how they'll be implemented, but their simple flair should fit in with the game's cel-shaded appearance. Namco Bandai is shooting for a summer release for Extreme Challenge, so you'll have a way to stay active when the weather gets too hot. **—CHRIS SH.**



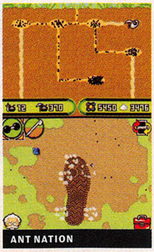
[Below] Nothing says "extreme" like synchronized jump rope!





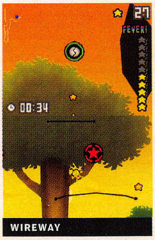
Aliens & Ant Farms

Konami announces two new IPs—**WireWay** and **Ant Nation**—for DS.



ANT NATION

Konami is proving that original things come in small packages with its recent announcement of two all-new DS titles: strategy game Ant Nation and innovative platformer WireWay. Ant Nation, due for release this summer, puts you in charge of an ant colony. Commanding worker ants and soldier ants, you'll collect resources, fight enemy creatures, and expand your colony; you'll also get to abuse your ants with fire, water, shoes, and more, which actually builds up their resistance to said hazards. A WiiWare version is in the works as well. Konami will follow up Ant Nation with the fall release of WireWay, a quirky game about an alien named Wiley Springer who's on a mission to find true love. To complete Wiley's quest, you'll use the touch screen to sling the fellow around on rubbery wires, avoiding obstacles and collecting stars as you attempt to reach the goal in 60 levels. What Ant Nation and WireWay lack in name recognition they promise to make up for with oodles of creativity. **—CHRIS H.**



WIREWAY

FAMILY PLAYTIME

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GAME WATCH FORECAST

Wii

Ace Attorney Investigations: Miles Edgeworth	Capcom	WIN 09
Active Life: Extreme Challenge	Namco Bandai	SUM 09
Ant Nation	Konami	SUM 09
Arc Rise Fantasia	XSEED	SPR 09
Bakugan	Activision	Q4 09
The Beatles: Rock Band	MTV Games	9/09
The Bigs 2	2K Sports	7/09
Boom Blox Bash Party	Electronic Arts	5/09
A Boy and His Blob	Majesco	FALL 09
Brave: A Warrior's Tale	SouthPeak	7/09
Chaotic	Activision	FALL 09
Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs	Ubisoft	Q3 09
The Conduit	Sega	6/09
Cursed Mountain	Deep Silver	2009
Dawn of Discovery	Ubisoft	6/09
Dead Space Extraction	Electronic Arts	FALL 09
Deca Sports 2	Hudson	FALL 09
The Destiny of Zorro	505 Games	5/09
DiRT 2	Codemasters	9/09
EA Sports Active	Electronic Arts	5/09
Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: The Crystal Bearers	Square Enix	TBA
Ghostbusters: The Video Game	Atari	6/09
G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra	Electronic Arts	8/09
Go Play: Circus Star	Majesco	6/09
Go Play: City Sports	Majesco	SUM 09
Go Play: Lumberjacks	Majesco	5/09
Grand Slam Tennis	EA Sports	6/09
Guitar Hero Smash Hits	Activision	6/09
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	Electronic Arts	7/09
Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs	Activision	6/09
Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings	LucasArts	6/09
Karaoke Revolution	Konami	2009
Let's Tap	Sega	6/09
Little King's Story	XSEED	6/09
Little League World Series Baseball 2009	Activision	6/09
Madden NFL 10	EA Sports	8/09
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games	Sega	2009
Mini Ninjas	Eidos	FALL 09
The Munchables	Namco Bandai	5/09
Muramasa: The Demon Blade	Ignition	2009
MySims Agents	Electronic Arts	FALL 09
MySims Racing	Electronic Arts	6/09
Need for Speed Nitro	Electronic Arts	Q3 09
No More Heroes: Desperate Struggle	TBA	2010
Our House: Party!	Majesco	6/09
Overlord Dark Legend	Codemasters	6/09
Phantom Brave: We Meet Again	NIS America	6/09
Play the World	DreamCatcher	6/09
Pyroblazer	TBA	TBA
Rabbids Go Home	Ubisoft	2009
Real Heroes: Firefighter	Conspiracy	Q2 09
Red Steel 2	Ubisoft	WIN 09
Reel Fishing: Angler's Dream	Natsume	5/09
Resident Evil	Capcom	2009
Resident Evil: The Darkside Chronicles	Capcom	WIN 09
Resident Evil Zero	Capcom	2009
Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus	2K Play	FALL 09
Roogoo Twisted Towers	SouthPeak	6/09
Runaway: The Dream of the Turtle	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Sam & Max Season Two	Atari	2009
Silent Hill: Shattered Memories	Konami	2009
Sin and Punishment 2	Nintendo	2009
Space Camp	Activision	6/09
Spectrobes: Origins	Disney	FALL 09
Spore Hero	Electronic Arts	2009
Spyborgs	Capcom	2009
Story Hour Adventures	Zoo	2009
Story Hour Fairy Tales	Zoo	2009
The Strike	Psyclone/XS Games	9/09
Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles: Smash Up	Ubisoft	9/09
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 10	EA Sports	6/09
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	Activision	6/09
Virtua Tennis 2009	Sega	6/09
Wii Sports Resort	Nintendo	7/09
Yu-Gi-Oh! 5D's Wheelie Breakers	Konami	5/09

NINTENDO DS

Again: Eye of Providence	Tecmo	SPR 09
Ant Nation	Konami	SUM 09
Bakugan	Activision	Q4 09
Bleach: The 3rd Phantom	Sega	FALL 09
Blood Bowl	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Brave: Shaman's Challenge	SouthPeak	7/09
Chaotic	Activision	FALL 09
Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs	Ubisoft	Q3 09
Dawn of Discovery	Ubisoft	6/09
Dawn of Heroes	Majesco	6/09
de Blob	THQ	Q2 09
DiRT 2	Codemasters	9/09
Disciples II	Strategy First	TBA
Doodle Hex	TBA	TBA
Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Reverie	Square Enix	TBA
Dragon Master	DreamCatcher	4/09
Drama Queens	Majesco	SPR 09
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Chain Reaction	Deep Silver	2009
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Critical Mass	Deep Silver	10/09
Duke Nukem Trilogy: Proving Grounds	Deep Silver	2009
Dungeon Raiders	Focus Home Interactive	SUM 09
Ghostbusters: The Video Game	Atari	6/09
G.I. Joe: The Rise of Cobra	Electronic Arts	8/09
Guitar Hero Modern Hits	Activision	6/09
The Hardy Boys: Treasure on the Tracks	Sega	FALL 09
Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince	Electronic Arts	7/09
Harvest Moon: Frantic Farming	Natsume	6/09
Hot 'n' Cold	Majesco	2009
Ice Age: Dawn of the Dinosaurs	Activision	6/09
Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings	LucasArts	6/09
Infinite Space	Sega	2009
Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days	Square Enix	2009
Knights in the Nightmare	Atlus	6/09
Last King of Africa	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks*	Nintendo	2009
The Legendary Starfy	Nintendo	6/09
LEGO Battles	Warner Bros.	6/09
Little League World Series Baseball 2009	Activision	6/09
Mario & Luigi RPG 3*	Nintendo	2009
Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games	Sega	2009
Marker Man Adventures	Majesco	6/09
Mega Man Star Force 3: Black Ace	Capcom	8/09
Mega Man Star Force 3: Red Joker	Capcom	8/09
Miami Law	Hudson	6/09
Mini Ninjas	Eidos	FALL 09
Monsters Racers	Koei	2009
My Healthy Cooking Coach	Ubisoft	6/09
MySims Agents	Electronic Arts	FALL 09
MySims Racing	Electronic Arts	6/09
Naruto Shippuden: Ninja Council 4	Tomy	6/09
Nostalgia	Ignition	9/09
Overlord Minions	Codemasters	6/09
Pet Vet Down Under	Deep Silver	TBA
Phantasy Star 0	Sega	FALL 09
Pirate Battle	Orbital Media	TBA
Puzzle Chronicles*	Konami	2009
Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus	2K Play	FALL 09
Rockin' Pretty	Aksys	6/09
Roogoo Attack!	SouthPeak	6/09
Runaway: The Dream of the Turtle	Focus Home Interactive	TBA
Sands of Destruction	Sega	SUM 09
Scribblenauts	TBA	Q4 09
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor	Atlus	6/09
Space Camp	Activision	6/09
Spore Hero Arena	Electronic Arts	2009
Sushi Academy	City Interactive	Q2 09
Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen	Activision	6/09
Treasure World	Aspyr	SUM 09
Warlords DS	Strategy First	TBA
WireWay	Konami	FALL 09
A Witch's Tale	NIS America	FALL 09
Yu-Gi-Oh! 5D's Stardust Accelerator: World Championship 2009	Konami	5/09

RED TEXT = TITLES ADDED THIS MONTH *TENTATIVE TITLE NOTE: RELEASE DATES OFTEN CHANGE

BITS OF TID

Wright Gets Stupid

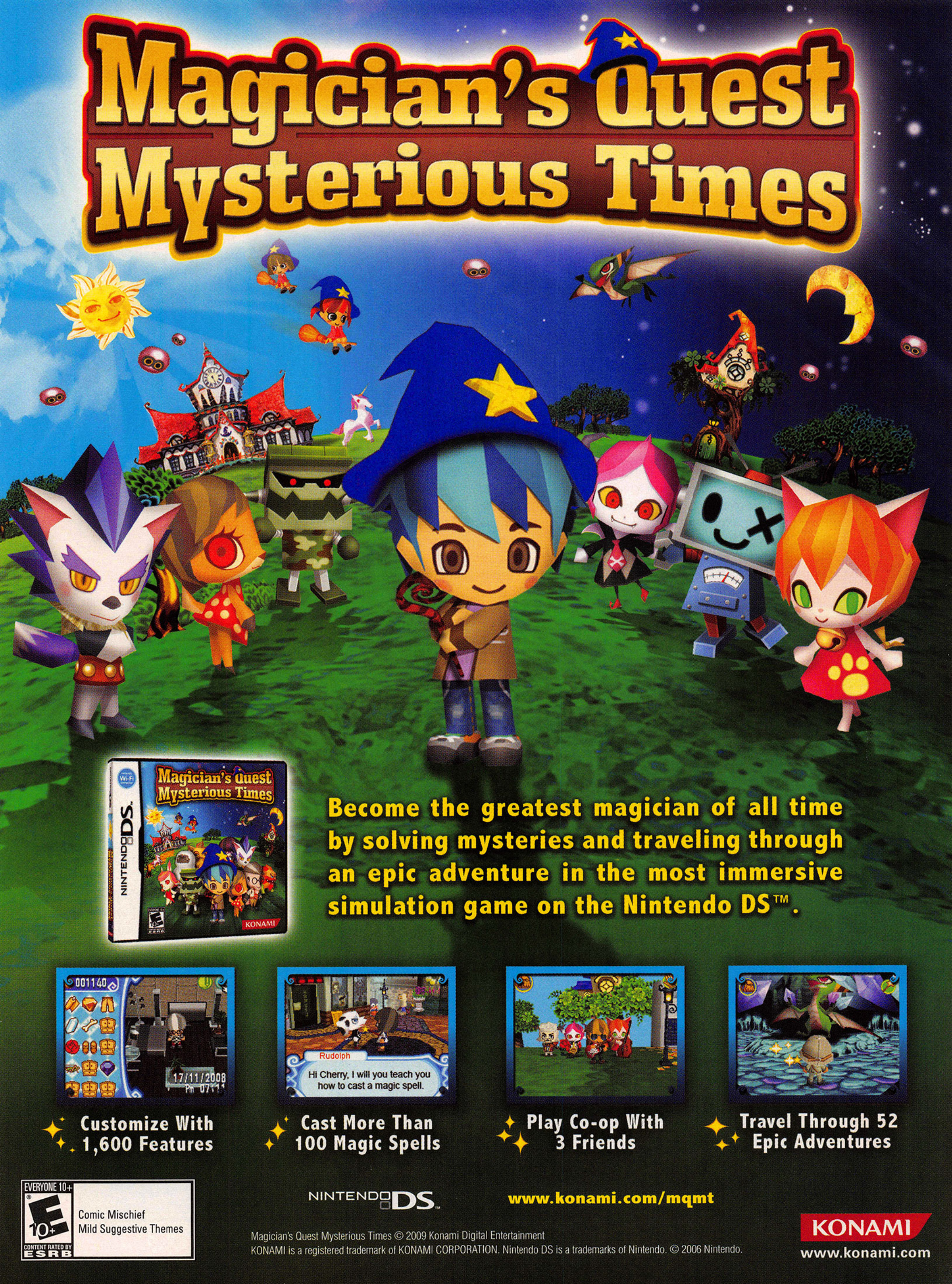
Spore creator leaves EA to start new venture.

Electronic Arts announced that Will Wright, famed designer of SimCity, The Sims, and Spore, has departed the company to head Stupid Fun Club, an entertainment think tank. "The entertainment industry is moving rapidly into an era of revolutionary changes," said Wright in a statement. "Stupid Fun Club will explore new possibilities that are emerging from this sublime chaos and create new forms of entertainment on a variety of platforms." Wright and EA are the principal shareholders of Stupid Fun Club.

Layton Gets Tenure

Our favorite professor prepares another lesson.

Asked about the series' future in North America, producer Akihiro Hino recently said that he would like all five remaining titles to reach our shores eventually, and that his team was currently localizing the second game. We'll be keeping an eye out for an official announcement from Nintendo about the game's release.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- Play Co-op With 3 Friends
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Comic Mischief
Mild Suggestive Themes

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Final Fantasy Times Two

WiiWARE NEWS
Three More Games from Hudson

FIRST LOOK
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Double the Fantasy

Square Enix treats WiiWare users to not one but two new games: **Final Fantasy IV: The After Years** and **Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: My Life as a Darklord**.

The obvious irony of the Final Fantasy brand is that nothing about it is final. In fact, it's more prolific than ever. That's evident even where WiiWare is concerned, as Square Enix is preparing two new entries in the franchise—Final Fantasy IV: The After Years and Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: My Life as a Darklord—for release in 2009.

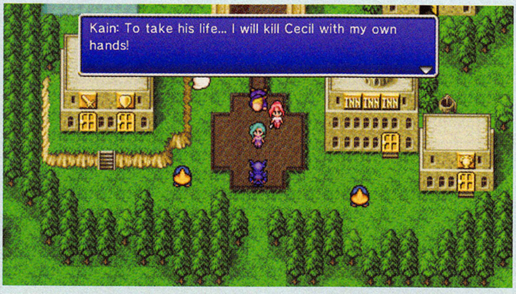
Final Fantasy IV: The After Years is a direct sequel to the beloved 16-bit RPG Final Fantasy IV. Originally released episodically for mobile phones in Japan, the WiiWare version marks the game's console and North American debut. Staying true to its classic roots, The After Years features traditional RPG gameplay and a 2-D, 16-bit graphical style, but all-new stories explain what happened following the conclusion of Final Fantasy IV.

Set a generation after FFIV, The After Years begins in an era of peace. The main character, Ceodore—the son of FFIV heroes Cecil and Rosa—is following in his father's footsteps by joining the Red Wings and hoping to prove himself as a knight. As the adventure proceeds, you'll be joined by characters both new and old.

"You can definitely expect to see some familiar faces, as well as brand-new characters and others from the original title that you never thought you would run into again," reveals producer Takashi Tokita. "They have all evolved in different ways. Some are now ruling a nation as king, while others are in the midst of reaching adulthood, struggling to figure out their future."

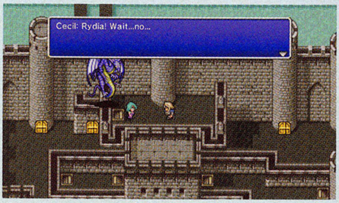
Fans will also recognize the return of the popular active-time battle (ATB) system. "The fundamentals are the same as the original, with gameplay revolving around the ATB system," Tokita explains. "However, in addition there is now a new battle element which significantly increases the strategic element, as well as the band system, which calls for the use of multiple characters."

The Japanese mobile-phone release of The After Years arrived in 13 segments, but the WiiWare version will be collected into fewer episodes (while keeping all the same content). Some episodes will be told from

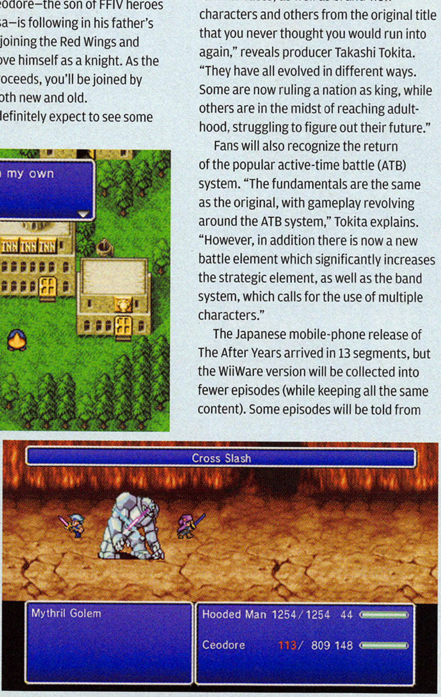


Kain: To take his life... I will kill Cecil with my own hands!

The visuals of Final Fantasy IV: The After Years are old-school, but the adventure is all-new.



Cecil: Rydia! Wait...no...

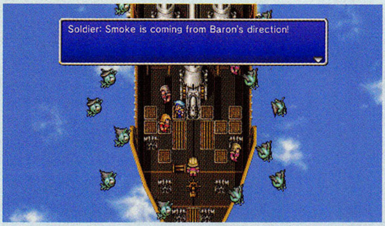


Cross Slash

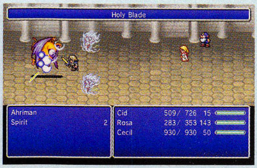
Mythril Golem

Hooded Man 1254/1254 44

Ceodore 113/ 809 148



Soldier: Smoke is coming from Baron's direction!



Ahriman
Spirit 2

Cid 509/ 726 15
Rosa 283/ 353 143
Cecil 930/ 930 50

[Above] The classic active-time battle system returns with new strategic elements.

different perspectives, and may feature intersecting or parallel storylines. Each episode will also include one challenge dungeon for extra replay value.

Most importantly, The After Years should appeal to Final Fantasy vets and newcomers alike. "Having the characters and plot be a driving force in a game is a common convention these days," states Tokita, "and we wanted to build upon that, making a new style of 'download per episode' gaming. We also know that fans really love these characters, and [we] put a lot of thought into their growth and destinations to create something that lives up to expectations. For fans who played the original release and are now enjoying Wii games with kids of their own, it would be great if, just like Cecil and Ceodore, the adventure in Final Fantasy IV: The After Years could be enjoyed across both generations."

The second upcoming Final Fantasy WiiWare game is far less conventional. As you can guess from its title, Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: My Life as a Darklord lets you play the bad guy for once.

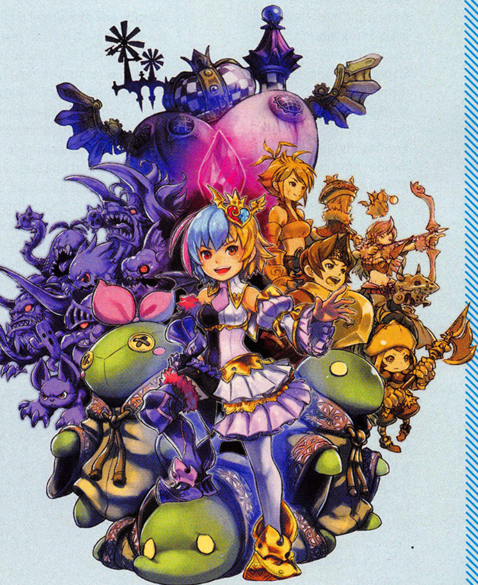
"Many games revolve around a main character who is either a straight-A student or hero of some sort, so we wanted to create a game that could put players in the villain's shoes for a refreshing perspective," explains producer Hiroaki Iwano. "We feel that players will be able to enjoy Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles in a whole new way, now with dialogue, plot developments, and cinematics that are possible only because the story is being told from the bad guy's point of view."

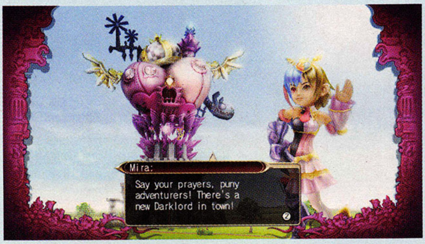
However, the bad guy you control—a fledgling villainess named Mira—isn't quite as evil as she'd like to be. "Basically she is a rookie who has just taken up the position of Darklord," describes scenario director Motomu Toriyama. "Her life at the tower is protected by minion Tonberries, and she is also a princess that was spoiled rotten growing up. She's set on taking over the world, but stumbles along trying to prove her authority as Darklord since she is, after all, new to the job."

With numerous heroes hoping to take you down and earn names for themselves, it's up to you to fend them off, real-time-strategy-style, by using traps and creatures to guard your stronghold.

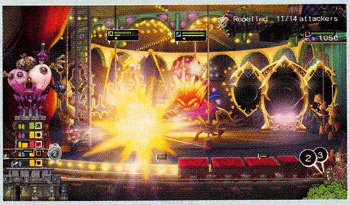
"The main objective is for players to protect the Dark Crystal from adventurers invading from ground level. In order to do this, players need to create new floors, eventually building a tower," states director Hiroyuki Kaneko. "Each floor comes with trap mechanisms called artifacts, and while that alone gives players offensive and defensive abilities, summoning monsters to fill the empty spaces on each floor will enhance your attacks. Adventurers invade as parties, and a stage is cleared once all of them are warded off. If they reach the Dark Crystal on the uppermost level, you stand defeated."

Whether the heroes win or the bad guys reign supreme is up to you, but one thing is certain: Final Fantasy fans have a lot to look forward to on WiiWare. **—CHRIS H.**

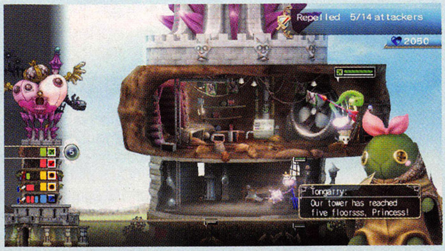




Mira:
Say your prayers, puny adventurers! There's a new Darklord in town!



The indicators on the left side of the screen show the battle's status.

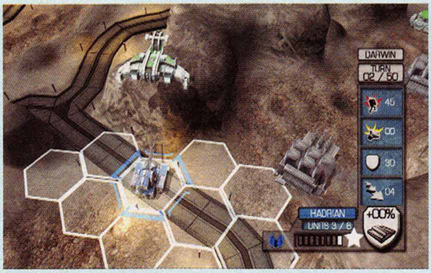


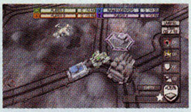
Tongarry:
Our tower has reached five floorsss, Princess!

Four Scores

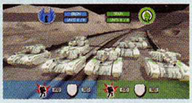
The Wii System Menu 4.0 makes WiiWare and Virtual Console games even more convenient.

System updates aren't usually the kind of thing to get excited about, but the Wii System Menu 4.0—released in March—adds new memory-card functionality that significantly enhances the way you can play, store, and download games and channels. First and foremost, the system upgrade allows you to launch WiiWare games, Virtual Console games, and most channels (such as the Nintendo Channel) straight from an SD or SDHC (high-capacity) memory card; you're no longer restricted by the Wii console's internal memory. An SD Card Menu button in the lower-left corner of the Wii Menu screen allows you to access all the software you have stored on the card—up to 240 games, depending on the size of the memory card. Additionally, when you purchase games from the Wii Shop Channel, you can download them to your memory card directly. Coinciding with the menu update, Nintendo announced that arcade games would be available for purchase through the Wii Shop Channel under the apt moniker of Virtual Console Arcade. Both the Wii System Menu 4.0 and the Virtual Console Arcade titles are available now. —**CHRIS H.**





Ah, hex grids. How we've missed you, Military Madness.



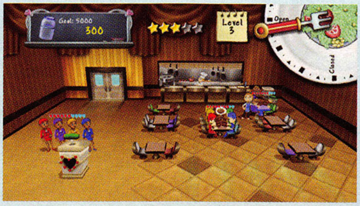
Hudson Hat Trick

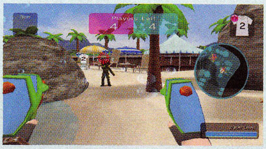
An all-new FPS, a classic revival, and an established franchise make up Hudson's trio of upcoming WiiWare titles.

Already one of the most prolific supporters of WiiWare, Hudson recently reaffirmed its commitment by announcing three new titles that should hit in the coming months. The first game out the gate is Water Warfare—a wet-'n'-wild multiplayer-oriented first-person shooter in which you battle your pals with water guns instead of bullets. It might not sound as hardcore as your run-of-the-mill FPS, but Water Warfare's packed with features: several match types (traditional deathmatch play, the capture-the-flag-style Treasure match, the base-conquering Assault match, and more), numerous weapons (including water-based equivalents of machine guns, shotguns, sniper rifles, and rocket launchers), eight maps (four environments, each available in large and small sizes), intuitive controls, and online play for up to eight participants. Single-player modes are included as well.

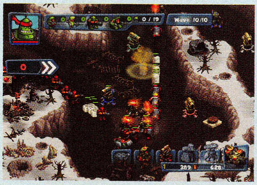
Hudson is also reviving one of its most revered franchises from the 16-bit era: Military Madness. If you played the hit hex-grid strategy game on TurboGrafx16 or on Virtual Console, you know what to expect from the WiiWare version; developed by Backbone Entertainment, the game features essentially the same storyline and maps as the original, but with some minor tweaks and vastly improved graphics. A wide assortment of units (including infantry, Grizzly tanks, Panther motorcycles, and Rabbit assault vehicles) and ability-bestowing commanders will be under your control in 16 single-player missions and four-player online or offline versus battles.

The third game on tap is a WiiWare version of the successful PC game Diner Dash. Using the point-and-click capabilities of the Wii Remote controller, you'll help restaurant entrepreneur Flo seat guests, pass out menus, take orders, retrieve food, and bus tables in five differently themed eateries. In addition to a single-player mode, the game serves up two-player online co-op and versus play. —**CHRIS H.**





[Above] Acquire good weapons in Water Warfare or you'll be all washed up.



Beware of Beaver

The wacky robotic antics of Vogster's real-time strategy game Robocalypse—released on the Nintendo DS system last year—are headed to WiiWare this summer. Titled Robocalypse: Beaver Defense, this sequel is a tower-defense-style game in which you tactically place units and control hero characters to fend off multiple enemy waves that are commanded by—you guessed it—an evil beaver. Expect multiplayer action and, obviously, a very bizarre sense of humor.

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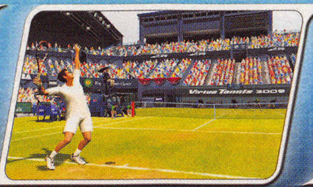
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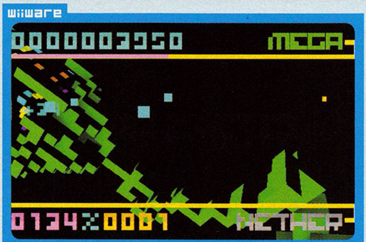
EVALUATION STATION

WiiWare



BIT.TRIP BEAT

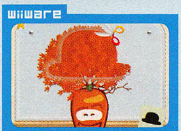
PUBLISHER: **AKSYS GAMES** · GENRE: **ACTION/RHYTHM** · Wii POINTS: **600**

George S's Pick

You don't need perfect rhythm to succeed in Bit.Trip Beat—just steady hands as you twist the Wii Remote to put a Pong-like paddle in the path of a ball barrage. Every hit merits a note, so you'll make music if you don't miss. The objects vary in size and trajectory. Advanced patterns and ball behaviors are ingenious, requiring you to make small but very quick adjustments to deflect all objects in a cluster. That results in a lot of satisfying hits and some near misses. If your luck runs out, everything goes monochromatic and the music stops to let you know that you'll have to step it up to survive.

Recommended

WiiWare



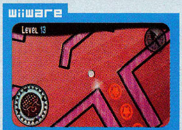
BONSAI BARBER

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
GENRE: **ALTERNATIVE**
Wii POINTS: **1,000**

In Bonsai Barber you are, as the title implies, a barber giving haircuts to various types of vegetation—sentient vegetation at that. Pretty darn weird. The gameplay, however, isn't as innovative as the premise. The tools implement the Wii controls effectively, but they just aren't very interesting, and since there's no time limit and you can fix most mistakes, there's not much challenge, either. It's also strange that you're limited to how much you can play each day. —CHRIS H.

Hmmm...

WiiWare



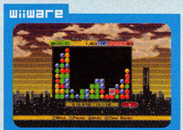
EQUILIBRIO

PUBLISHER: **DK-GAMES**
GENRE: **ACTION**
Wii POINTS: **500**

In Equilibrio, you use the Wii Remote or Wii Balance Board to tilt the world and get your ball to the goal. Using the Wii Remote to get things rolling works well (and is much more precise than using the Balance Board), the ball physics are solid (a paper ball behaves differently than a rubber ball, for example), and the price tag isn't too steep. But like the game's presentation, Equilibrio as a whole feels more functional than anything special. —JUSTIN C.

Hmmm...

WiiWare



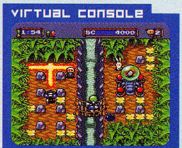
POP'EM DROP'EM SAMEGAME

PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
GENRE: **PUZZLE**
Wii POINTS: **500**

Your goal in puzzle game Pop 'Em Drop 'Em Samegame is to match two or more blocks of the same color, thereby eliminating them from the play field and dropping any blocks above them onto the ones below. Samegame is simple to learn (as any good puzzle title should be) and relatively inexpensive, but it would probably work better as a portable game so you could play it in short bursts more easily. —JUSTIN C.

Hmmm...

Virtual Console



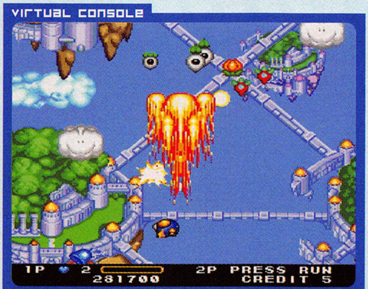
BOMBERMAN '94

PLATFORM: **TURBOGRAFX16**
PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
GENRE: **ACTION**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1993**

Bomberman '94 is technically a Japanese import, but don't worry about the language barrier; all you really need to know is that you're Bomberman and you blow stuff up. You also get to ride kangaroolike creatures that give you special abilities. The five-person multiplayer is a big draw (Bomberman is best played with friends), but the graphics deserve special note: they're pretty darn impressive. —JUSTIN C.

Recommended

Virtual Console



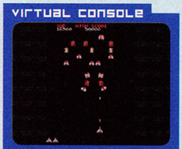
DETANA!! TWIN BEE

PLATFORM: **TURBOGRAFX16** · PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
GENRE: **SHOOTER** · ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1992**

There were a lot of solid shooters back in the 16-bit days, and Detana!! Twin Bee was one of them. Co-op play, cute pastel graphics, and zany enemies make the emphasis more on fun than on hardcore technique, but the game is full of challenging twitch action and interesting features, such as a unique power-up system and the ability to bomb foes that your bullets can't touch. Detana!! Twin Bee is also a historical curiosity; it was the first game Castlevania producer Koji Igarashi worked on, and this marks the first time the title has been released outside of Japan. —CHRIS H.

Recommended

Virtual Console



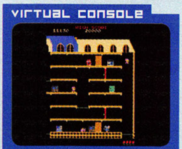
GAPLUS

PLATFORM: **ARCADE**
PUBLISHER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
GENRE: **SHOOTER**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1984**

The lesser-known follow-up to classic Galaga offers slightly more intense space-shooter action from the start, and the freedom to move your ship vertically as well as horizontally. That gets you closer to the action for more accurate shots, but makes it more likely that you'll get hit by a stray bullet. An enemy-juggling challenge stage adds variety, but the bulk of the game is pure space-shooter. —GEORGE S.

Hmmm...

Virtual Console



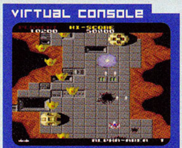
MAPPY

PLATFORM: **ARCADE**
PUBLISHER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
GENRE: **ACTION**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1983**

Law-enforcing mouse Mappy deals with a house full of cat burglars in a vertically oriented action game that has strong similarities to Pac-Man. Instead of dots, though, you're in charge of collecting the house's valuables without colliding with cats. You can use trampolines to reach the top floors, and doors to knock out enemies. The game was designed to pull in quarters at the arcade, so expect quick and challenging play. —GEORGE S.

Recommended

Virtual Console



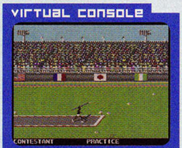
STAR FORCE

PLATFORM: **ARCADE**
PUBLISHER: **TECMO**
GENRE: **SHOOTER**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1984**

Star Force is old-school in the truest sense: the 25-year-old vertical-scrolling arcade shooter is challenging, particularly since you're given only one power-up for your ship (rapid fire). Fortunately, you can play with a buddy, and this Virtual Console version allows you to change the difficulty and number of lives you have (though it's still certainly not a cakewalk). —JUSTIN C.

Hmmm...

Virtual Console



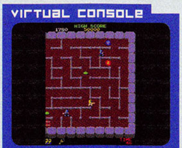
SUMMER GAMES II

PLATFORM: **COMMODORE 64**
PUBLISHER: **COMMODORE GAMING/ EPYX**
GENRE: **SPORTS**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1985**

From the glitchy pixel screen that flashes between events to the lack of instructions and inconsistent controls, Summer Games II is a sports compilation that only the most forgiving retro gamer could enjoy. Players will find eight challenges, such as fencing and triple jump, to stumble through, but success requires a lot of trial and error and offers little in the way of a reward. —GEORGE S.

Grumble Grumble

Virtual Console



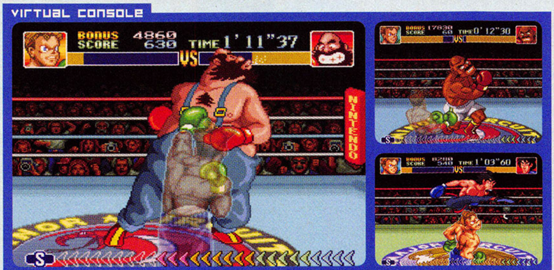
THE TOWER OF DRUAGA

PLATFORM: **ARCADE**
PUBLISHER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
GENRE: **ACTION**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1984**

The Tower of Druaga has some neat ideas—completing certain conditions to get useful treasures such as jet boots—but it has a very old-school difficulty level. It's not so much finding your way to the randomly placed keys and exit doors in each level (since the mazes are recycled) that's the issue; it's doing so while under a time limit and trying to attack/avoid enemies who can kill you with just one hit. —JUSTIN C.

Hmmm...

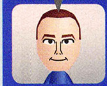
Virtual Console



SUPER PUNCH-OUT!!

PLATFORM: **SUPER NES** · PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** · GENRE: **SPORTS** · ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1994**

Chris Sl's Pick



Super Punch-Out!! has finally come to Virtual Console, just in the nick of time—the game has been at the top of my personal most-wanted list since the Wii Shop Channel opened, and after enjoying the new Punch-Out!! title for Wii, I would've gone berserk if the wait had stretched much longer. The great thing about Super Punch-Out!! is that its unique mix of action and puzzle-ish pattern memorization is still as fun today as it ever was, and its huge character sprites are much easier on the eyes than the tiny boxers in the original NES console classic. Super Punch-Out!! is also a perfect complement to the new game since it plays almost exactly the same way but shares only five of its 16 opponents with the Wii title. Learning each character's punches—and training yourself to dodge them—can be frustratingly hard, but the eventual wins are always worth it. Further, this game offers an inexpensive opportunity to try out the series if you're on the fence about the Wii game.

Recommended

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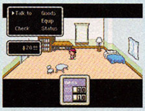
WANTED!

Action-RPGs, strategy-RPGs, traditional RPGs—all were valid entries in this issue's most-wanted Virtual Console poll. Perennial favorite Earthbound took the readers' top spot, while the editors are hopeful for a long-overdue North American release of action-RPG Terranigma, the sequel to Soul Blazer and Illusion of Gaia.



READERS' MOST WANTED: RPGS

1. Earthbound (Super NES)
2. Mother (NES/Japan only)
3. Final Fantasy VI (Super NES)
4. Terranigma (Super NES/ Europe & Japan)
5. Final Fantasy IV (Super NES)

NP STAFF'S MOST WANTED: RPGS

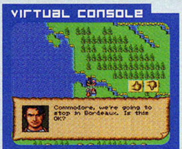
1. Terranigma (Super NES/ Europe & Japan)
2. Final Fantasy VI (Super NES)
3. Ogre Battle 64: Person of Lordly Caliber (N64)
4. Earthbound (Super NES)
5. Soul Blazer (Super NES)

Arcade games have come to Virtual Console, and we want to know which ones you want the most! Send your top five most-wanted **arcade games** to **vcpoll@nintendopower.com** and we'll print the results in the near future. Note: This is for polling purposes only and will in no way determine future Virtual Console releases.

EVALUATION STATION

WIIWARE
VIRTUAL CONSOLE
DSIWARE

VIRTUAL CONSOLE



Commodore, we're going to stop in Bordeaux. Is this OK?

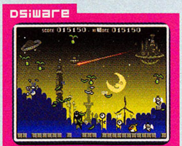
UNCHARTED WATERS: NEW HORIZONS

PLATFORM: **SUPER NES**
PUBLISHER: **KOEI**
GENRE: **RPG**
ORIGINAL RELEASE: **1994**

Complex sailing sim New Horizons throws you into the deep end at the start. You'll engage with plenty of characters who provide 16th-century piratey flair, but few who offer advice on how to survive ship battles and sword fights. Once you do develop your sea legs, you'll enjoy the immense freedom of sailing in open waters, trading goods, and accumulating a fleet of ships. —**GEORGE S.**

Hmmm...

DSIWARE



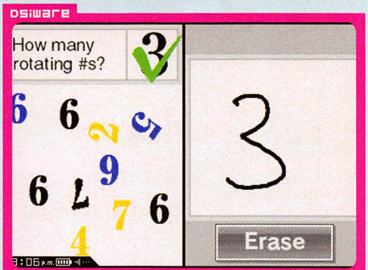
BIRD & BEANS

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
GENRE: **ACTION**
NINTENDO DSi POINTS: **200**

I'm very torn about Bird & Beans, an arcade-style action title that was originally a WarioWare bonus activity. On one hand, you get what you pay for. The game is extremely basic and straightforward; there's no level progression, little in the way of technique, and only a high score to aim for as you attempt to grab or shoot falling beans. On the other hand, the action gets fairly addictive despite its simplicity, and it's great for short play bursts. —**CHRIS H.**

Hmmm...

DSIWARE



How many rotating #s?

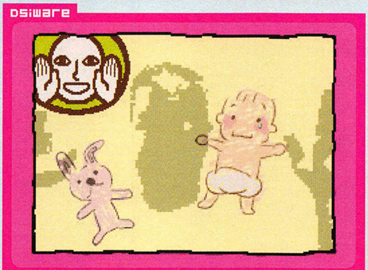
BRAIN AGE EXPRESS: MATH

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** · GENRE: **BRAIN TRAINING** · NINTENDO DSi POINTS: **800**

Much of Brain Age Express: Math revolves around answering math problems as fast as possible, which—while surely a good way to stay sharp—quickly becomes all exercise with little fun. The title's most compelling aspect is its new Themes mode, in which you snap photos of yourself, draw pictures, and record your voice while reading from cheesy scripts. These tasks provide goofy fun—for a while, at least. —**CHRIS SL.**

Hmmm...

DSIWARE



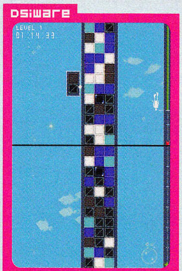
WARIOWARE: SNAPPED!

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** · GENRE: **ALTERNATIVE** · NINTENDO DSi POINTS: **500**

WarioWare: Snapped! is one of the few Nintendo DSi Shop launch games created specifically for sale via the service, and is played exclusively with the Nintendo DSi Camera, making it an appealing pick for folks who want something fresh to show off the signature feature of their new handheld. You can blow through the title's 20 minigames in about 10 minutes, however, and none of them are especially memorable. The highlight of playing Snapped! is seeing the photos and movie clips that the camera secretly takes of you during play. It's a fun treat the first time someone sees himself being a goofball, and the appeal of Snapped! lasts as long as you have unsuspecting friends to surprise. —**CHRIS SL.**

Hmmm...

DSIWARE



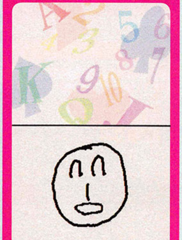
ART STYLE: AQUIA

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
GENRE: **PUZZLE**
NINTENDO DSi POINTS: **500**

Like most of the Art Style games on WiiWare, Aquia is a fairly simple puzzle game, but it's one you can play for hours on end. Though anyone can pick up on the color-matching, block-shifting premise, only a skilled player will be able to conquer the higher difficulty levels. And with three styles of play, each requiring you to master different tactics, that should keep you occupied for a while. —**CHRIS H.**

Recommended

DSIWARE



MASTER OF ILLUSION EXPRESS: FUNNY FACE

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
GENRE: **ALTERNATIVE**
NINTENDO DSi POINTS: **200**

Funny Face was one of the tricks included in the retail version of Master of Illusion, which I thought was a pretty cool piece of software for kids to enjoy with their families. This particular trick isn't especially convincing, though, and it's downright lame if you don't have a deck of cards handy. —**STEVE T.**

Grumble Grumble

Test your strategic might on the Island of Phantoms!
Phantom Brave
We Meet Again
TM
Coming June!
INCLUDES DIGITAL ART DISC!
All-new exciting chapters!
A Gridless Battle Map for greater strategy!
Challenge your dark side!
Ash
LV
HP
REMOVE
Plain Phantom
Receiving Protection
(none)
Sending Protection
2
TURN ORDER
60 dm
MOVE
Strike
Cancel
ATK
RATING PENDING
RP
CONTENT RATED BY ESRB
Wii
NIS America
www.NISAmerica.com
日本一 SOFTWARE

Blaspheny Incarnate, Dark Eboreus!

You're running into an ally!

A basic unarmed attack. effect. Can't combine

Here I come!

May contain content inappropriate for children. Visit www.esrb.org for rating information.

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THIS MONTH IN PREVIEWS

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Swimming with the Stars

>THE LEGENDARY STARFY

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS** • PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **TOSE** • RELEASE: **JUNE 2009**

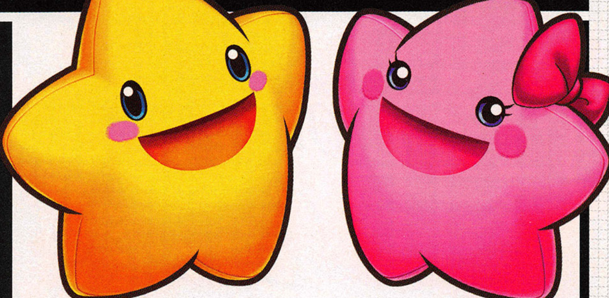
After "starring" in four games in Japan (three on Game Boy Advance and one on the Nintendo DS system), the adventures of the star-shaped hero, Starfy, are finally coming to North America. The Legendary Starfy begins when Starfy, prince of the land of Pufftop, has an unexpected encounter with a mysterious bunnylike visitor named Bunston. One thing leads to another, and the next thing you know, Starfy has fallen from his lofty abode and into the ocean below.

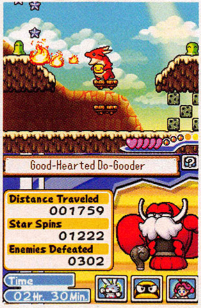
Luckily, Starfy takes to water like it's his second home. You can easily maneuver the hero in any direction underwater by simply pressing the Control Pad, make him dash by moving while holding B, and unleash a mighty spin by pressing Y—great for defeating enemies and smashing through barriers. Starfy's pretty talented on land, too; he can jump, glide, slide, and more, and he learns even more moves as the adventure progresses.

After discovering that Bunston is suffering from amnesia and on the run from several shadowy enemies, Starfy vows to help him by tracking down several crystal shards that will restore his memory. The quest takes you through eight worlds—ranging from tropical oceans to toasty hot springs to icy coves—and more than 50 levels. Though there are plenty of enemies and obstacles to keep you busy, there's also a ton to do off the beaten path—there are loads of secret stages, hidden passages, treasure chests, and special challenges. The game features occasional puzzle elements, as well (using rocks to destroy otherwise-invulnerable enemies, for example), not to mention an exciting boss battle at the end of each world.

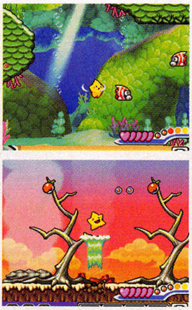
Although the game isn't overly challenging, in some stages you can call upon a second player to lend a hand (or five) over a local wireless connection by taking control of Starfy's sister, Starly, who has her own unique moves. Furthermore, at some points in the game Starfy can join forces with Bunston and transform into a powerful creature—a fire-breathing little dragon and an ice-spike-projecting seal, among others.

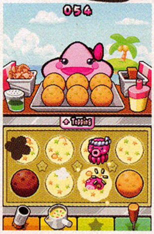
A variety of touch-screen minigames and plentiful unlockables round out the package. Between the vibrant graphics, robust move set, and wealth of gameplay, The Legendary Starfy feels a lot like a Kirby game with an underwater twist, and that can be only a good thing for Nintendo-platformer fanatics. —CHRIS H.



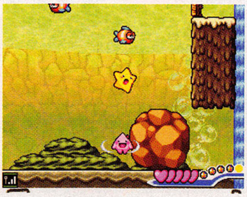


Good-Hearted Do-Gooder
Distance Traveled 001759
Star Spins 01222
Enemies Defeated 0302
Time 02 Hr. 30 Min.

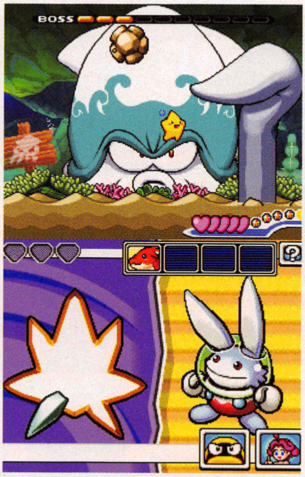


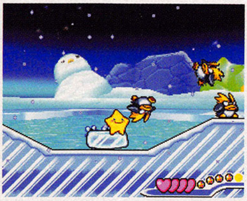


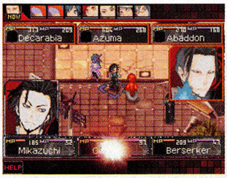
[Above] You can play several touch-screen minigames, including a dumpling-cooking contest.

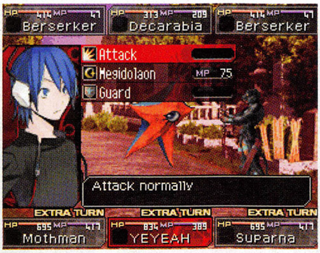


[Above] Need a hand? Then have a second player join in as Starly, Starfy's sister. Starly can wall-jump, crawl, and low-spin to reach places that Starfy can't.

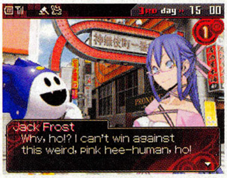





HP 313 MP 209 Decarabia
HP 604 MP 268 Azuma
HP 270 MP 168 Abaddon
HP 185 MP 52 Mikazuchi
HP 208 MP Berserker
HELP

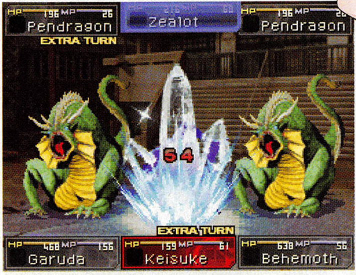

HP 414 MP 47 Berserker
HP 313 MP 209 Decarabia
HP 414 MP 47 Berserker
Attack
Megidolaon MP 75
Guard
EXTRA TURN
HP 695 MP 417 Mothman
HP 834 MP 389 YEYEAH
HP 695 MP 417 Suparna

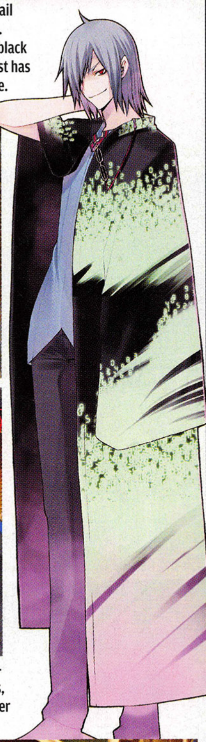
Attack normally

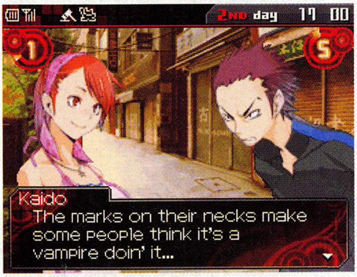

3RD day 15 00

Jack Frost
Why, ho!? I can't win against this weird, pink hee-human, ho!

The game's demons hail from many traditions. Decarabia's a lord of black magic, while Jack Frost has his roots in Viking lore.

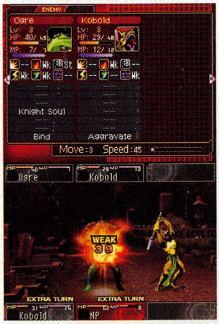

HP 196 MP 26 Pendragon
Zealot
HP 196 MP 26 Pendragon
EXTRA TURN
54
EXTRA TURN
HP 468 MP 156 Garuda
HP 159 MP 61 Keisuke
HP 638 MP 56 Behemoth




2ND day 17 00

Kaido
The marks on their necks make some people think it's a vampire doin' it...

[Above] Kaido's a hard-nosed street-gang boss, but you'll need whatever allies you can find.


ENEMY
Ogre
Kobold
Knight Soul
Bind
Aggravate
Move:3 Speed:45
Ogre
Kobold
WEAK 39
EXTRA TURN
EXTRA TURN
Kobold
NP

As the Devil Drives

>SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: DEVIL SURVIVOR

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS** • PUBLISHER: **ATLUS**
DEVELOPER: **ATLUS** • RELEASE: **JUNE 2009**

We can say one thing for Atlus's Devil Survivor: it doesn't waste any time at all. When things happen in this game, they happen fast. The game spends a couple of minutes introducing itself, and then bang, bang, bang—the lights go out and it's time to run wild with the demons through downtown Tokyo.

A couple of "days" into the game (the adventure spans a single virtual week, providing you manage to live that long), it's hitting the right pace for a handheld strategy sim. The story never slows down to take its time, and neither does the combat system. Most players, in fact, will have to hurry to keep up.

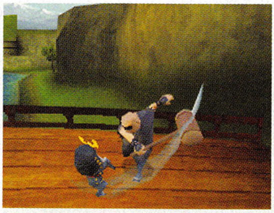
While it's billed as a strategy-RPG, Devil Survivor puts most of the emphasis on strategy. The parts of the game that don't involve killing demons are pretty straightforward. At any time you can go to several parts of Tokyo to see the sights or interact with key characters, and despite a plot that gradually unfolds with plenty of weird twists and turns, the way forward is usually clear enough and almost always leads through the next big battle.

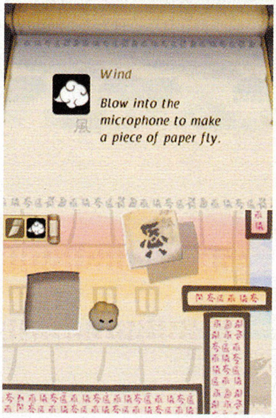
Although the combat system is turn-based, it moves very quickly—as quickly as you're willing to let it, really. A lot of the mental heavy lifting takes place between battles, as you decide how to arrange your teams of human characters and demons. The party is made up of four characters, but each of them actually fights as a three-man unit: a human backed up by two pet demons. Setting up a team involves some basic trade-offs and lends itself to different play styles. Do you pair up a character with demons that have the same kind of strengths and create a very focused, specialist team, or try to counterbalance your characters with demons that cover their weaknesses?

Make the wrong choice, and the punishment can be brutal. Devil Survivor has a steep learning curve, as the Megami Tensei games often do, and it's easy to take a beating in even the earliest battles. On the other hand, mastering more-advanced tactics pays off in a big way. For example, the Extra Turn system lives up to its name: if you can target an enemy's elemental weaknesses, a finely tuned party can dish out twice as much damage as its opponents.

Besides all that, Devil Survivor looks and sounds completely different from anything else in the genre. We don't often get to see a strategy-RPG with a rock-'n'-roll soundtrack and with modern Tokyo as the backdrop. The DS has plenty of turn-based battle games coming out this year, but so far this one looks like it's going to be a standout. —**DAVID S.**

Look for ninjas to dominate the next winter Olympics.

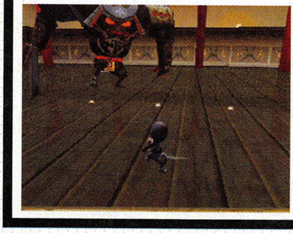


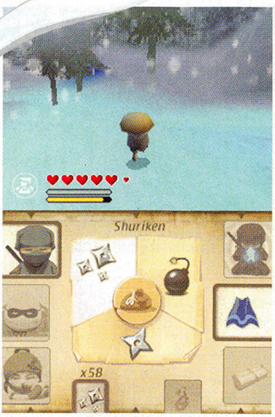


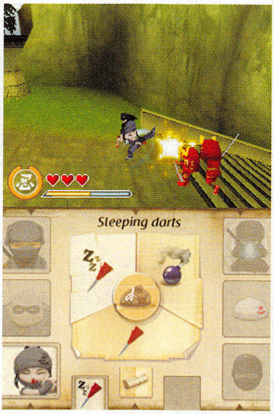
Wind

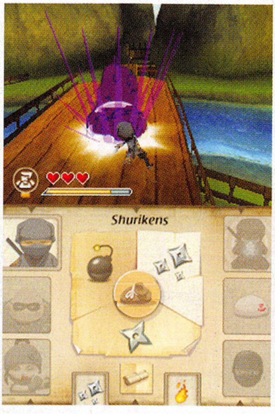
Blow into the microphone to make a piece of paper fly.

[Above] The 2-D spirit world features a unique aesthetic and creative challenges.









Cut Down to Size

>MINI NINJAS

PLATFORM: **Wii, NINTENDO DS** • PUBLISHER: **EIDOS**
DEVELOPER: **IO INTERACTIVE** • RELEASE: **FALL 2009**

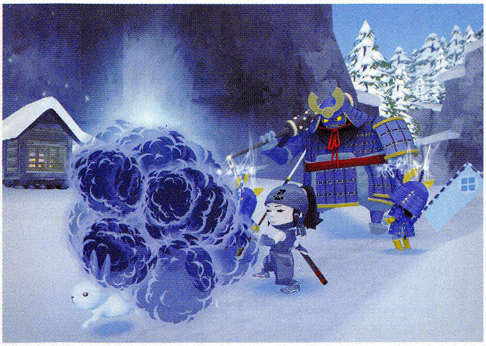
Ninjas: Stealthy. Deadly. Adorable? When you think of ninjas you don't usually think of cute and cuddly, but that's certainly part of Eidos's Mini Ninjas. As for the stealthy and deadly parts? They're here too, along with a lot more.

Mini Ninjas is a 3-D action-adventure game that puts you into the tabi boots of Hiro, the youngest trainee in Ninja Village. Your mission: to defeat the Evil Samurai Warlord, who's been using magic to turn innocent animals into an army of unstoppable warriors and unleashing devastating natural disasters in the process. Inexperienced Hiro is probably the last ninja you'd want to send on a mission of such vital importance, but seeing as all of his comrades have been captured or defeated, the task falls to him, along with his slow but powerful best friend Futo. In this case, the least likely are the most dangerous.

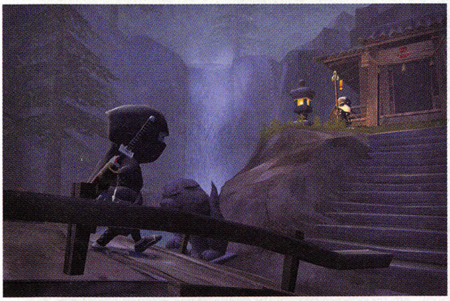
As you explore the countryside (swapping between characters at any time depending on whether you need Hiro's agility or Futo's power) you'll engage in all manner of typical ninja activities—sneaking through rice fields, hopping across rooftops, defeating enemies in sword-to-sword combat—as well as a few atypical ones, such as using your hat as a shield, boat, or makeshift sled. Hiro also learns to use ninja magic, which can be used not only for attacking enemies (with fireballs, for example), but also to pass into the spirit realm and take control of a variety of animals, each with different abilities (such as a mouse for entering small areas or a bear for terrifying your foes). After you rescue your ninja allies from the warlord's clutches, they'll join you, giving you access to even more skills; female ninja Suzume can play her flute to make enemies dance uncontrollably, for instance. You'll have to determine which talents are best for the task at hand as you fight giant bosses, explore a wide variety of environments, and tackle numerous side quests.

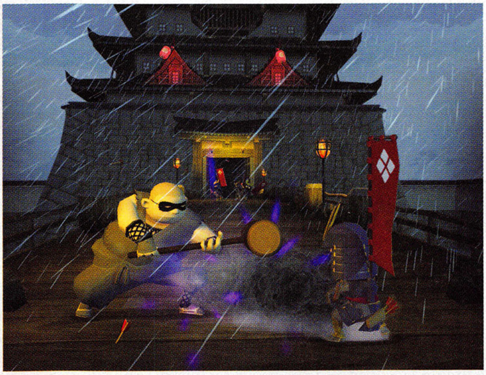
Though the basic run-jump-slash gameplay is the same whether you're playing Mini Ninjas on the Wii console or the Nintendo DS handheld, the two versions do have some differences; the Wii game has six playable characters, for example, compared to only three on DS, and the DS version has touch-screen controls for swapping characters and quickly selecting spells and items. The DS game also has its own unique (and very cool) version of the spirit world, where you use touch-screen-based tools—a paintbrush, a cutting device, a wheel, and more—to interact with 2-D environments to solve puzzles, thereby letting you travel across the Plane of Spirits to access new areas. No matter which version of Mini Ninjas you play, however, you can expect ninja action that's fast, ferocious, and decidedly huggable.

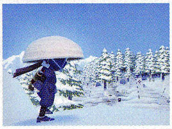
—CHRIS H.



Different characters, such as Suzume [above] and Futo [below], have different abilities.







[Above] You know what they say about guys with big hats: they have big heads.

All in the Wrist

> TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 10

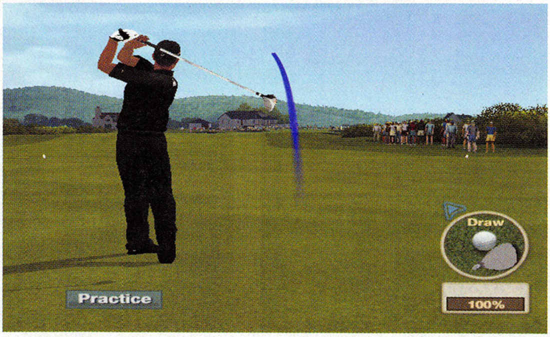
PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **EA TIBURON** • RELEASE: **JUNE 2009**

The genius of the Tiger Woods PGA Tour series has always started with its innovative swing mechanic, first employing a joystick-rocking motion for traditional game pads, then moving to a more intuitive grip-and-rip style with the Wii Remote controller. The introduction of the Wii MotionPlus accessory brings that swing one step closer to the real thing.

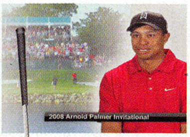
In describing the relationship between the remote in his hands and the club in Tiger Woods's hands onscreen, senior producer Jay Shenkman says, "The expectation is that it is going to do exactly what I do, resulting in a consistency the likes of which has not been seen before." For drives and approaches to the green, the accessory reads subtle twists in your grip to determine draws and fades. For putting, it keeps track of the angle of the putter, and the timing and force of your stroke. In the past it was difficult for the remote to read extremely soft shots, but Wii MotionPlus allows you to dial down to as little as one percent of a full swing. You can play without the accessory, of course, and also use the putting scheme employed in earlier versions, which offers different putters based on the distance to the hole, but the new scheme brings you much closer to the way golf feels on real-world links. Notes Shenkman, "After playing the game, I can't wait to get out onto [an actual] course. The principles [for success that you use] in the game are the same principles you use in real life."

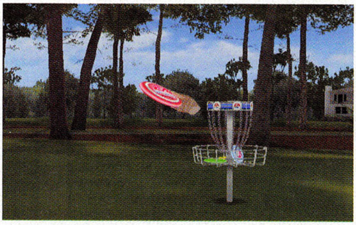
The game's other new emphasis is on bringing the PGA-tournament experience to the forefront. Spectators line the sides of the fairways and greens, and you can keep track of the progress of other pros while you're making your way through the course. In Tour Challenge mode (which replaces Tiger Challenge mode), the game drops you into scenarios from recent tournaments and asks you to perform as well as the pros. About a dozen of the scenarios are preceded with video introductions by Woods describing the situation, such as his 25-foot birdie putt to win the 2008 Arnold Palmer Invitational at Bay Hill and his playoff against Rocco Mediate in the 2008 US Open. The site of that win, Torrey Pines, is one of seven new courses for the series; others include Bethpage Black (the site of the 2009 US Open), Banff Springs, and Turnberry (where the 2009 British Open will take place).

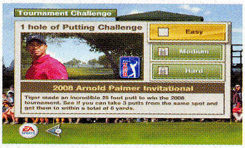
Beyond traditional golf, the game offers disc golf on PGA Tour courses. Aided by the Wii MotionPlus, the game detects every subtle twist of your wrist to mirror a real-life fling of a disc. Says Shenkman, "You haven't really lived until you've thrown a disc on Sawgrass 17." —**GEORGE S.**



[Above] Once you play Tiger with Wii MotionPlus, you'll never want to go back. You might need to work on that draw, though.

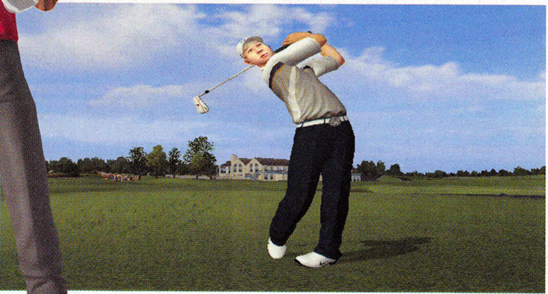






2008 Arnold Palmer Invitational

Tiger made an incredible 25 foot putt to win the 2008 tournament. See if you can take 3 putts from the same spot and get them to within a total of 6 yards.



Wii
Wii
KLONOA
KLONOA
EVERYONE
10+
E
10+
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Tobacco Reference
ESRB CONTENT RATING
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Spies Unlike Us

>SPYBORGS

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM**
DEVELOPER: **BIONIC GAMES** • RELEASE: **2009**

PREVIEW JUNE '09

Say hello to the Spyborgs: Clandestine, the speedy female ninja; Bouncer, the big powerhouse that looks kind of like a gorilla; and Stinger, the balanced fighter whose arm can transform into a multitude of weapons. Oh yeah, there's also Jackal—the psycho bad guy who's snapped and gone all Sylar on his fellow Spyborgs, killing them and taking their powers. Ah, the things you have to deal with when you're part of an elite, cybernetically enhanced crime-fighting unit.

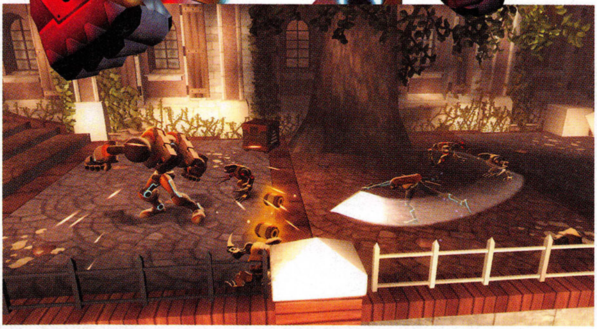
Despite the word *spy* in the title, you don't do much espionage in Spyborgs. It's basically the modern equivalent of a classic co-op arcade brawler, in which you and a friend each pick one of the three heroes (or in single-player mode you pick two characters and swap between them, with the CPU controlling whichever one you're not) and then beat the bolts out of Jackal's robotic army.

Most of the action involves traditional controls—you move with the Control Stick, jump with A, block with Z, and trigger light and heavy attacks with B and C, respectively. Gestures come into play when executing special attacks. Jumping and flicking downward with the Wii Remote, for example, yields a pounding attack, and after building up your combo meter and countering an enemy's strike, you can unleash special character-specific gesture-based finishing moves. Since Clandestine uses a sword, her finishers involve making slicing motions with the remote; the actual attack animation varies depending on the type of enemy you're facing. Better yet, if both players have full combo meters they can collaborate for a devastating cooperative superattack in which one player launches the enemy into the air before the other player clobbers the vulnerable foe.

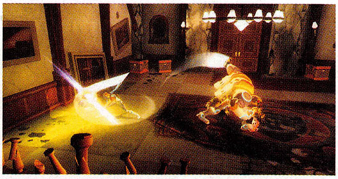
The Spyborgs do, at least, have one ability that focuses on observing rather than just pummeling enemies. By pointing at the screen with the Remote you can use spy vision, which lets you see invisible objects. Some contain power-ups (such as invulnerability or double damage) whereas others are necessary for advancement—a control panel that extends a bridge, for instance. The developers are considering implementing cloaked enemies, too.

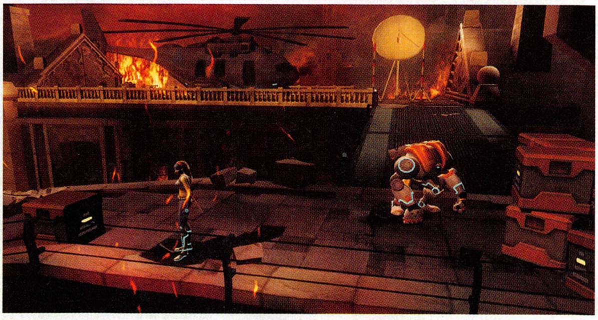
The battle against Jackal's forces takes you through a variety of environments; the game starts in the Spyborgs' secret mansion headquarters (X-Men, eat your hearts out), where you'll fight nimble ninja robots, enemies with scorpion-tail-like appendages, and huge crab mechs, then expands to more-exotic locales such as a forest and a massive yacht. Each level is punctuated by a challenging boss fight. The first boss—an absolutely enormous enemy robot you battle on the roof of the mansion—is one of the most impressive adversaries we've encountered in recent memory.

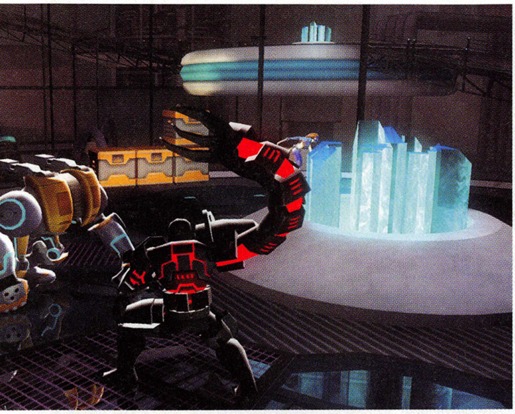
Throw in loads of flashy visual affects and a character-upgrade system, and you have one of the most promising Wii exclusives of 2009. —**CHRIS H.**

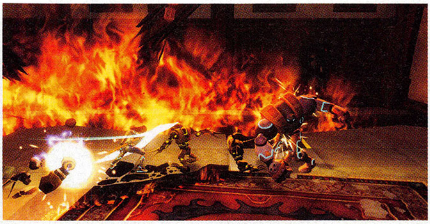


[Above] Clandestine relies on nimble sword attacks, while Bouncer uses pure brute force.

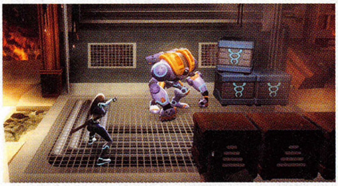


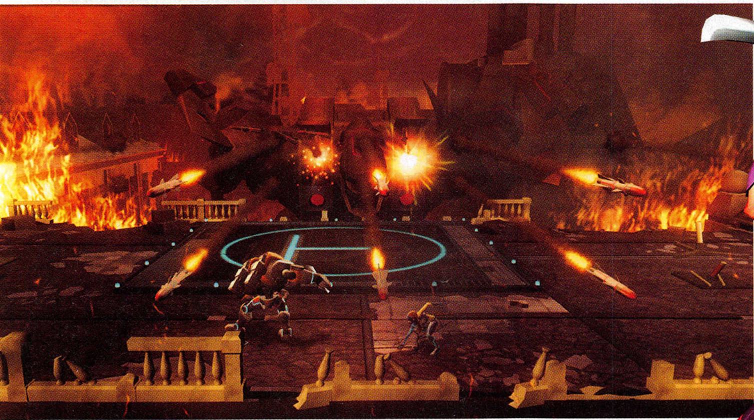




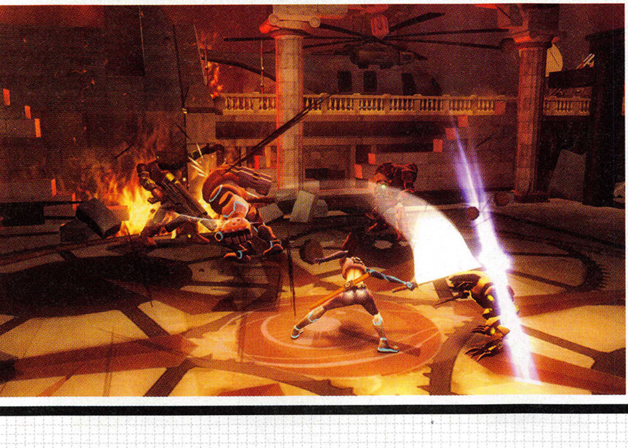


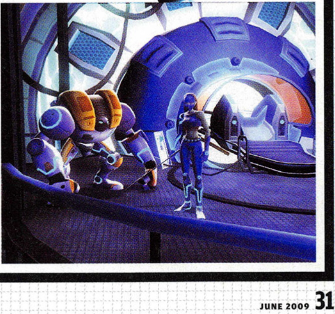
[Below] This gargantuan missile-firing robot puts up an intense multi-part fight—and he's only the first boss!





[Left] The Spyborgs mansion has seen better days. Think they have insurance for that?



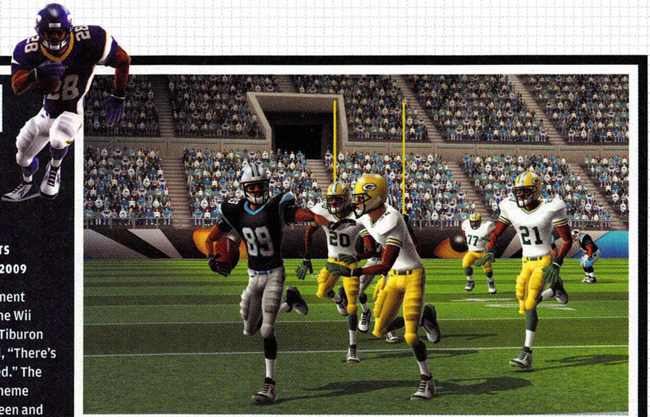


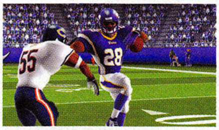
Home-Field Advantage

> MADDEN NFL 10

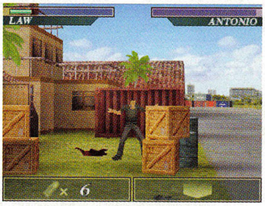
PLATFORM: Wii • **PUBLISHER:** ELECTRONIC ARTS
DEVELOPER: EA TIBURON • **RELEASE:** AUGUST 2009

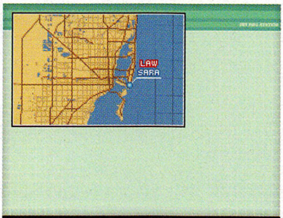
Electronic Arts has transferred development duties for the upcoming Madden title on the Wii console to its core Madden NFL group, EA Tiburon and, according to lead designer Matt Read, "There's not a pixel in this game that wasn't touched." The most significant improvement is an art scheme that changes everything from the title screen and menus to the design of the player models. Five basic body types give you an instant read on an athlete's abilities. Quarterbacks, for example, have heroic builds, with broad shoulders and a commanding presence, while running backs are compact, with narrow torsos and thick legs to suggest that they can get through defensive holes in a hurry. Stadiums, too, have a stylized look that makes them larger than life. The game's other big change is a departure from separate gestures for moves such as juking, tackling, and catching the ball; instead a context-specific system allows you to execute any number of tasks by shaking the Wii Remote. —GEORGE S.

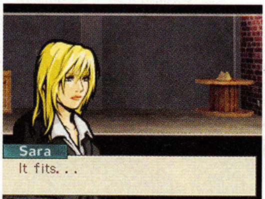




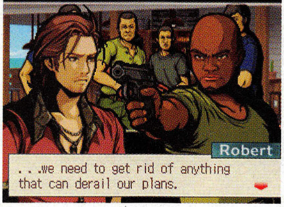
[Left] Even with a new visual style, you can expect Purple Jesus to go all day!



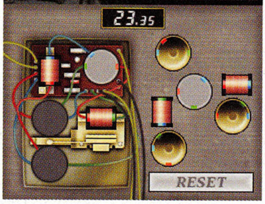




Sara
It fits. . .



Robert
. . .we need to get rid of anything that can derail our plans.



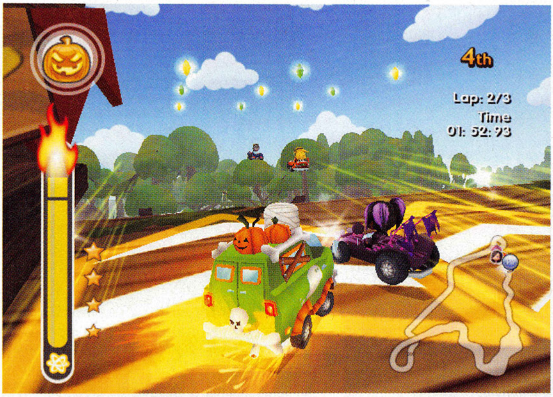
Would you wanna mess with a cop named Law? The bad guys offed his partner, and now they're gonna pay.

Lay Down the Law

> MIAMI LAW

PLATFORM: NINTENDO DS • **PUBLISHER:** HUDSON
DEVELOPER: HUDSON • **RELEASE:** JUNE 2009

Lone-wolf police officer Law Martin and cerebral FBI agent Sara Sterling have different approaches to law enforcement, but they both want the same thing—to put away the drug dealers, terrorists, and anybody else who's threatening the city of Miami. The bulk of Miami Law is a traditional graphic-text adventure game in which you talk to allies and suspects, examine objects, and visit a variety of locales such as criminal hideouts and Miami Beach. At certain points during the game, however, you'll have the option to choose whether you play as Law or Sara, and in addition to witnessing events from your chosen character's perspective, you'll engage in a different type of minigame. Law's events tend be more action-oriented—tapping the screen to shoot thugs or driving a car through the side of a warehouse—while Sara's are more puzzlelike and may involve matching a 3-D model to a static image or gathering intel on the number of enemies patrolling an area. You can also kick back with poker or sudoku when you want to take a break from your investigation. —CHRIS H.


4th
Lap: 2/3
Time
01: 52: 93

3rd
1st
2nd
7th

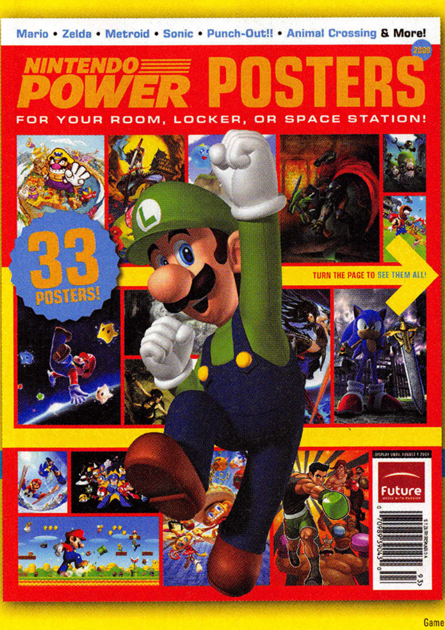
5th
Lap: 3/3
Time
01: 52: 07

Driving Sim

>MYSIMS RACING

PLATFORM: **Wii (ALSO ON DS)**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **THE SIMS STUDIO** • RELEASE: **JUNE 2009**

The MySims series isn't just about socializing anymore—in MySims Racing it's all about speed. The game has all the features you'd expect from a solid kart-racing title: more than a dozen themed tracks, multiple circuits, and numerous control schemes (including Wii Wheel compatibility). It's also got an assortment of crazy weapon power-ups: soccer-ball projectiles, acorns that make trees sprout in front of your opponents, Cupidlike bunnies that block your adversaries' view, tornadoes that flip the track upside down, and more. But since this is part of the Sims universe, the game also has tons of customization options—not only can you determine the appearance of your vehicle and driver in thousands of ways, but by collecting blueprints and Essence Crystals, you can upgrade your performance with new motors, frames, steering wheels, and special equipment. In addition to traditional races (in which up to four players can compete), the game features a story mode packed with various challenges such as collecting specific items strewn about the course, finishing a lap under a certain time, or defeating a cocky opponent in a one-on-one race. **—CHRIS H.**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That's How They Roll Out

> TRANSFORMERS: REVENGE OF THE FALLEN

PLATFORM: **Wii, NINTENDO DS** • PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **KROME (Wii)/VICARIOUS VISIONS (DS)**
RELEASE: **JUNE 2009**

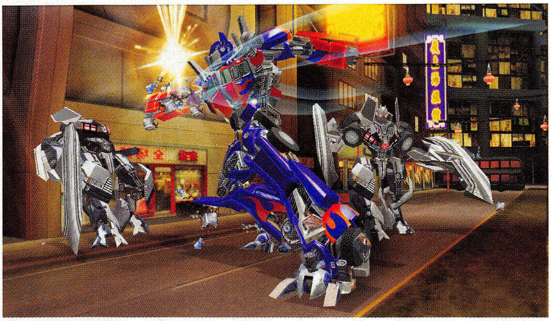
While Michael Bay's 2007 *Transformers* flick was a love-it-or-hate-it affair for longtime fans of the franchise, everyone could agree on two things: giant transforming robots beating the oil out of each other is cool and Peter Cullen is the one true voice of Optimus Prime. The good news is that you can get more of both in the upcoming Wii and DS games based on the film's sequel, *Transformers: Revenge of the Fallen*. The better news is that the Wii version has been specifically designed for the console.

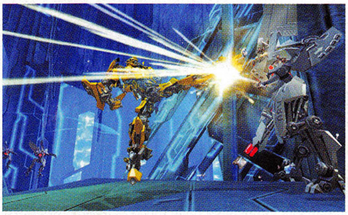
Playing as both the Autobots and the Decepticons, you punch, shoot, and drive/fly your way through a variety of levels. The first level we saw was a robot-centric one in Shanghai. Playing as Bumblebee, you can either punch your enemies by waggling the Wii Remote, or shoot them by pointing at the screen and pressing B for machine guns or Z for rockets. Unlike the preceding Transformers game, however, all of this action plays out from a side angle rather than directly behind your back, so you have the best view of the action and you don't have to fuss with the camera. This is especially helpful during platforming-style parts, such as when you wall-jump between two buildings to reach a higher area.

Naturally, you can transform into a car during this level—in fact, Bumblebee's crowd-clearing special attack has him going into car mode and doing doughnuts—but the second level we saw was much more car-focused. As a Decepticon named Sideways, you're being chased down a freeway by Bumblebee. It's akin to a racing game, only you can morph into a robot at any time and blast any Autobots who get in your way. (Another level, in which Starscream flies around and shoots down bogeys and aircraft carriers, plays similarly.)

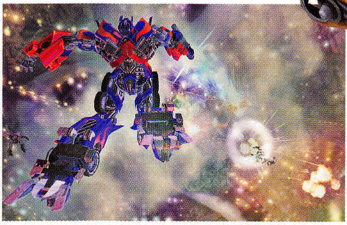
Each of the levels is playable solo, but developer Krome also drew inspiration from Super Mario Galaxy's cooperative element. At any point, a buddy can drop in and play as the Remote Weapons System, a support robot that can shoot enemies and shield or give energy to the main player. The game also features a separate Arena mode in which two people can play cooperatively via a split screen.

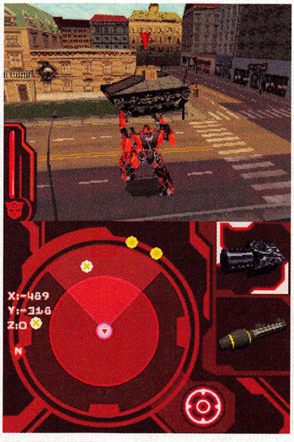
Two Nintendo DS games are also on the way: an Autobot version and a Decepticon version. In both, you take on the role of a new Transformer called, appropriately enough, the rookie, who has customizable stats and a wide array of weapons. The games seem to play similarly to the original DS titles, but Activision says the missions are more focused, meaning you'll spend less time wandering aimlessly.
—JUSTIN C.

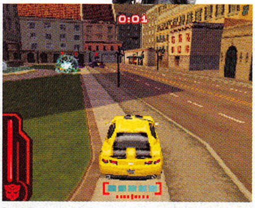




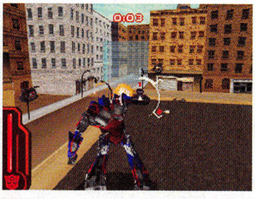
[Below] Optimus Prime busts some Deceptichops while he's skydiving. Now *that's* extreme.







[Left] Simply tap on the touch screen to swap between your two weapons.



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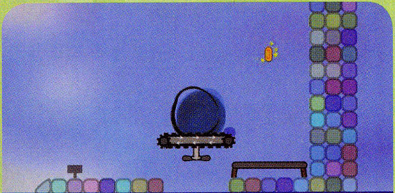
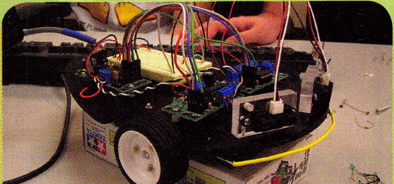


GAME DESIGN



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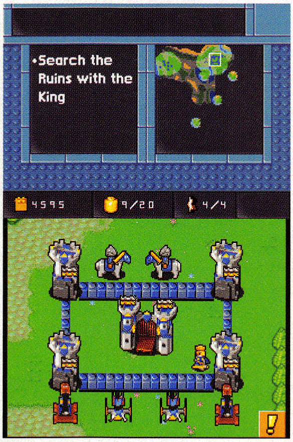
War and Pieces

>LEGO BATTLES

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS**
PUBLISHER: **WARNER BROS. INTERACTIVE**
DEVELOPER: **HELLBENT GAMES** • RELEASE: **JUNE 2009**

There have been plenty of LEGO games in recent years, but the latest—LEGO Battles—eschews the typical character-driven action formula for something on the opposite end of the gaming spectrum: real-time strategy. Though the game features the cute aesthetic and wry sense of humor that previous LEGO titles are known for, it does so with plenty of depth to back it up. Throughout the game's 90 levels you'll be able to play as several factions (medieval combatants, pirates, space warriors, etc.) and manage more than 80 unit types; in the medieval era, for example, you can use guardsmen, archers, knights, catapults, builders, and more, as well as hero characters who possess special powers that can turn the tide of battle in your favor. You've also got structures to build and maintain, and resources to gather and manage—LEGO studs, of course. Multiplayer mode emphasizes competitive, rather than cooperative, play, and unlike in the recent LEGO action games, you can actually fail in your missions, ensuring a decent challenge. **—CHRIS H.**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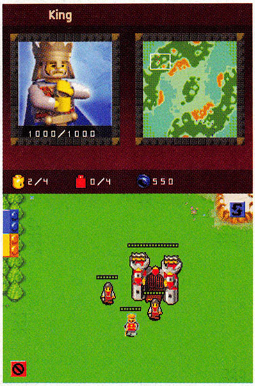
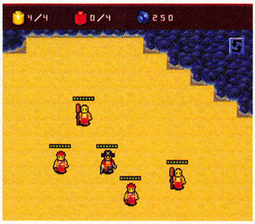
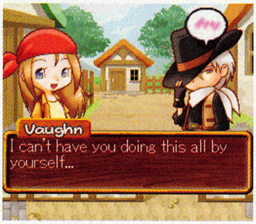
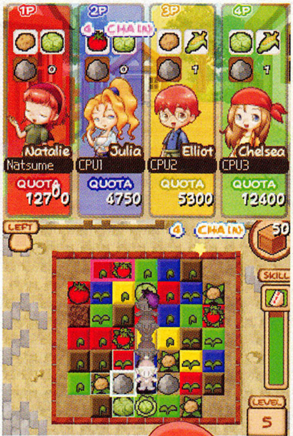
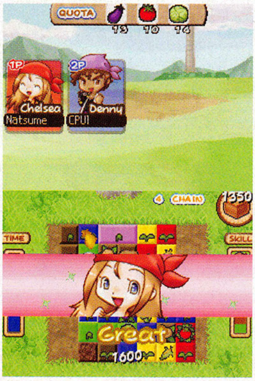





Vaughn
I can't have you doing this all by yourself...





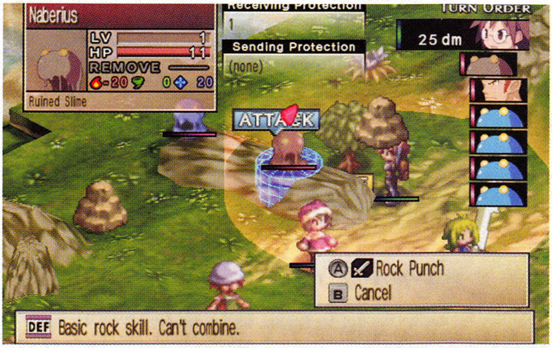
Series fans will recognize most of the characters from last year's DS title Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness.

Growth Opportunity

>HARVEST MOON: FRANTIC FARMING

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS** • PUBLISHER: **NATSUME**
DEVELOPER: **NATSUME** • RELEASE: **JUNE 2009**

Though the new DS puzzler in Natsume's Harvest Moon franchise follows the central farming theme of 2007's Puzzle de Harvest Moon, comparing the games would be like comparing eggplants to cabbages. Whereas the original title has you tending to plants by dropping seeds and fertilizer onto the field, Frantic Farming puts a helper sprite into the mix to do the dirty work so you can focus on the big picture. It amounts to a sliding-panel puzzle game in which you move the plants that are ready for harvest into the sprite's path. He picks them up then waters the adjacent plants to make them grow; it's surprisingly easy to pick up and play. Each of the dozen playable characters has a unique storyline and a special ability, too. Mark's Dog Rush, for example, causes his pet to circle the field, making the vegetables on the perimeter ripe for the picking. Every mission involves cooperation or competition with other characters, preparing you for the game's three multiplayer modes. **—GEORGE S.**


Naberius
LV 1
HP 11
REMOVE
-20 0 20
Ruined Slime
Receiving Protection
1
Sending Protection
(none)
TURN ORDER
25 dm
ATTACK
Ⓐ Rock Punch
Ⓑ Cancel
DEF

Basic rock skill. Can't combine.

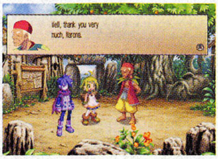
The Brave and the Bold

> PHANTOM BRAVE: WE MEET AGAIN

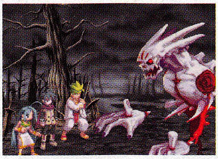
PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **NIS AMERICA**
DEVELOPER: **NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE**
RELEASE: **JUNE 2009**

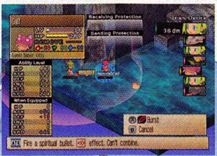
In tactical RPG Phantom Brave: We Meet Again, 13-year-old protagonist Marona takes on random jobs that usually end up with her fighting bad guys. She's not alone, of course; Marona can see phantoms, which she can make tangible by using her Confine ability to attach them to solid objects such as rocks and trees. However, objects affect the phantoms' stats—for example, a rock will improve a phantom's defense while worsening its agility. Once you've assembled your army—composed of either people you've recruited or phantoms Marona has created (who have jobs such as healer, merchant, soldier, and witch)—you're ready to take care of business.

If this is all old hat to you because you've already played Phantom Brave for PlayStation 2, fret not: the developers have included an extra chapter in the Wii edition, titled Another Marona. It can be played at any time—even before you play the main game—and introduces the new character Corona, who is the Marona from another dimension. **—JUSTIN C.**

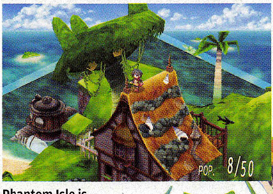


Well, thank you very much, Marona.

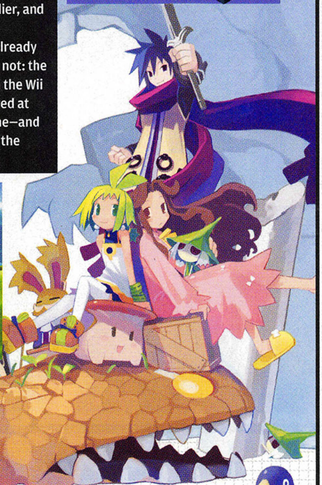



Receiving Protection
Sending Protection
TURN ORDER
38 dm
Ability Level
When Equipped
Ⓐ Burst
Ⓑ Cancel
ATK

Fire a spiritual bullet. effect. Can't combine.



Phantom Isle is kind of like the island from *Lost*.



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The Witching Hour

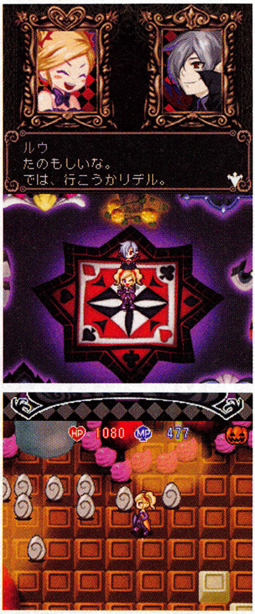
> A WITCH'S TALE

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS** • PUBLISHER: **NIS AMERICA**
DEVELOPER: **NIPPON ICHI SOFTWARE** • RELEASE: **FALL 2009**

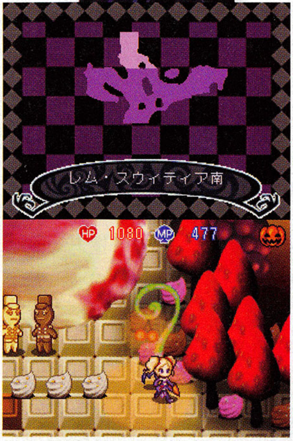
A Witch's Tale allegedly spent a year in limbo so NIS America could release it on Halloween. True or not, this DS RPG should be worth the wait; in addition to the cute cartoon graphics that come along with every NIS production, it has the kind of intuitive interface that you need in a game designed to play on the go.

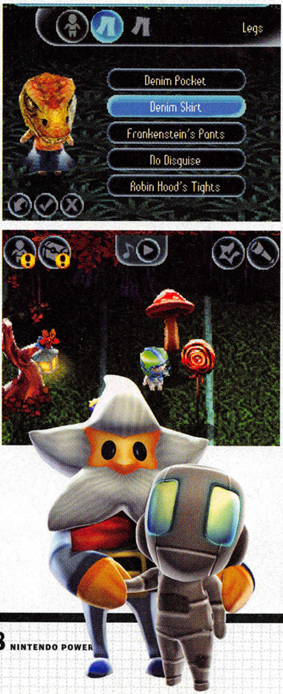
You control Liddell, the witch of the title, using only the DS touch screen. Casting a spell in combat is as simple as dragging an icon from a menu to the target. Besides her own magic, Liddell can bring a pair of her precious dolls into battle, each with its own personality and extra powers.

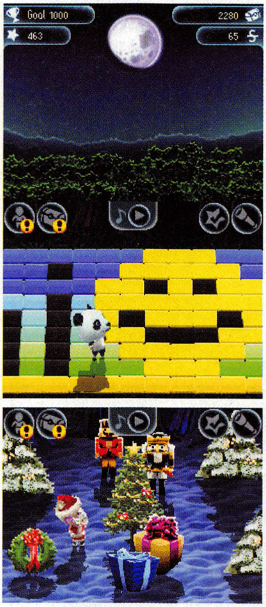
The game's world-building has some clever touches of depth to it, too—Liddell wanders through kingdoms inspired by classic fairy tales, from the Brothers Grimm to the ancient Japanese myth of the Bamboo Princess. There's more to the art direction than just pumpkins and pointy hats, although it certainly won't look out of place come Halloween. **—DAVID S.**



ルウ
たのもしいな。
では、行こうかリデル。





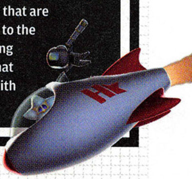


Prize Finder

> TREASURE WORLD

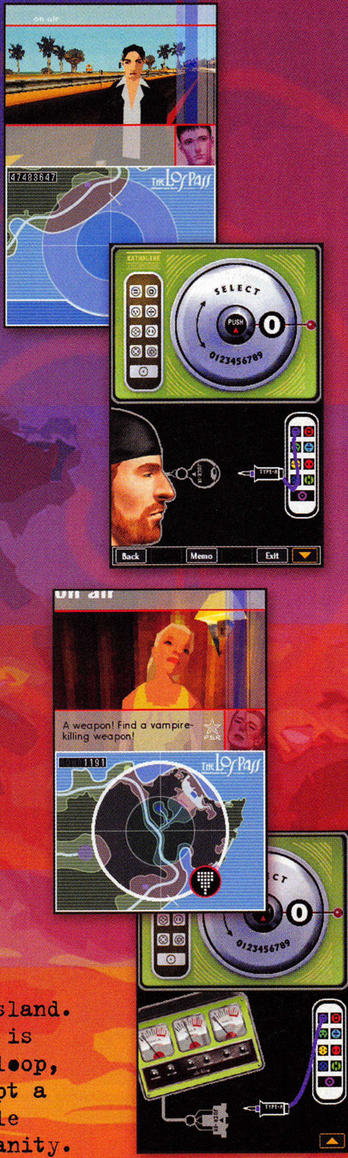
PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS** • PUBLISHER: **ASPYR**
DEVELOPER: **ASPYR** • RELEASE: **SUMMER 2009**

Half creative simulation, half real-world adventure, Treasure World motivates players to get off the couch and explore their surroundings. By bringing the game (and your Nintendo DS system) within range of anything giving off a Wi-Fi signal, you'll unlock a massive selection of in-game goodies—more than 2,200 in all—that you'll use to thoroughly customize your character and your environment. One reason to build your collection of goodies is to help the Starsweep—basically an intergalactic janitor—collect stardust so he can repair his ship. The other reason is to simply create your own personalized world; everything from your character's face to the groundcover can be modified, and you can place objects ranging from trees to jack-o-lanterns to cupcakes anywhere you see fit. Each object has a corresponding sound effect, allowing you to create unique soundscapes that are as pleasing to the ears as they are to the eyes. Additionally, Aspyr is planning an expansive online community that will let you share your creations with other users. **—CHRIS H.**



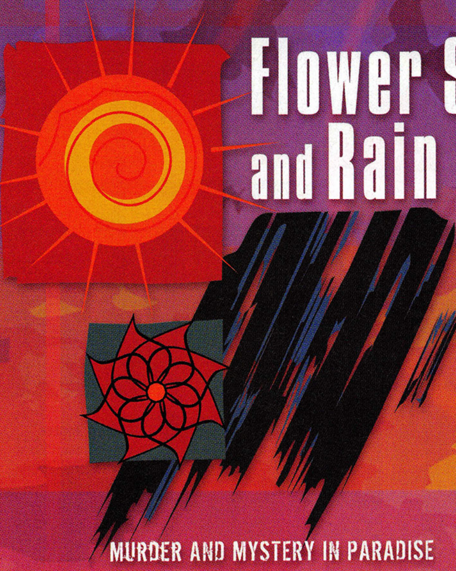
The twisted minds behind
No More Heroes,
Suda51 and Grasshopper Manufacture,

bring a new cult classic
to North America:



A weapon! Find a vampire-killing weapon!

Flower Sun and Rain



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Holding Court

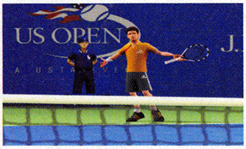
>GRAND SLAM TENNIS

PLATFORM: **Wii** • PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **EA CANADA** • RELEASE: **JUNE 2009**

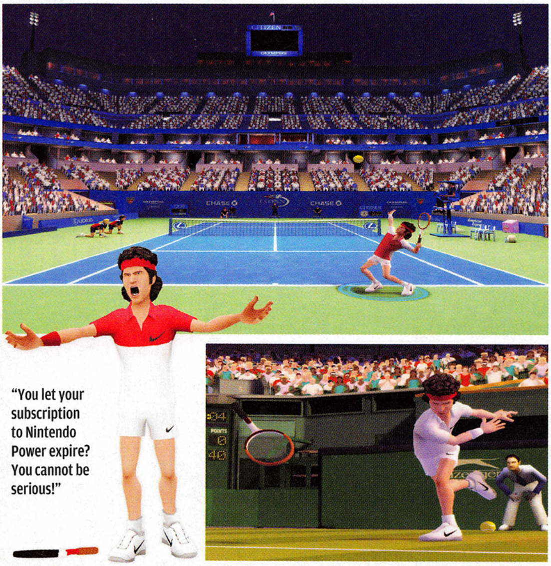
Don't let the exaggerated visual style fool you; Grand Slam Tennis may very well be the most authentic representation of the sport to date. Its compatibility with the Wii MotionPlus accessory and its unprecedented lineup of players and venues have been well-documented, but the game also boasts impressive attention to detail: If you're competing at the French Open, the on-court announcer will speak French. Not only do clay courts play slower than other surfaces, but players slide on them. And each of the game's famed athletes will reflect his or her real-life tendencies and characteristics, from Venus Williams grunting after each shot to John McEnroe slamming his racket to the ground in frustration.

Though it's the first tennis game from EA Sports in more than a decade, Grand Slam is also remarkably full-featured. In addition to a deep Grand Slam Career mode, it offers online play for both singles and doubles. You can match up with random opponents or via Friend Codes, and each online victory will contribute to your country's total on an international leaderboard. A variety of party modes are included, as well, but rather than put you in all sorts of bizarre fantasy situations, they simply offer interesting rules variations. In Aussie Doubles, for instance, it's two-on-one, with players rotating after each game (and the solo player earning double points if he wins).

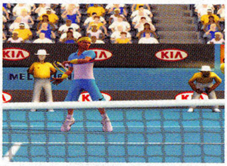
We'll have the full review next month, but the scouting report on Grand Slam Tennis looks promising. **—STEVE T.**

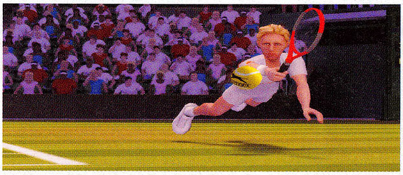


[Above] Grand Slam is the only tennis game to feature all four major tournaments.



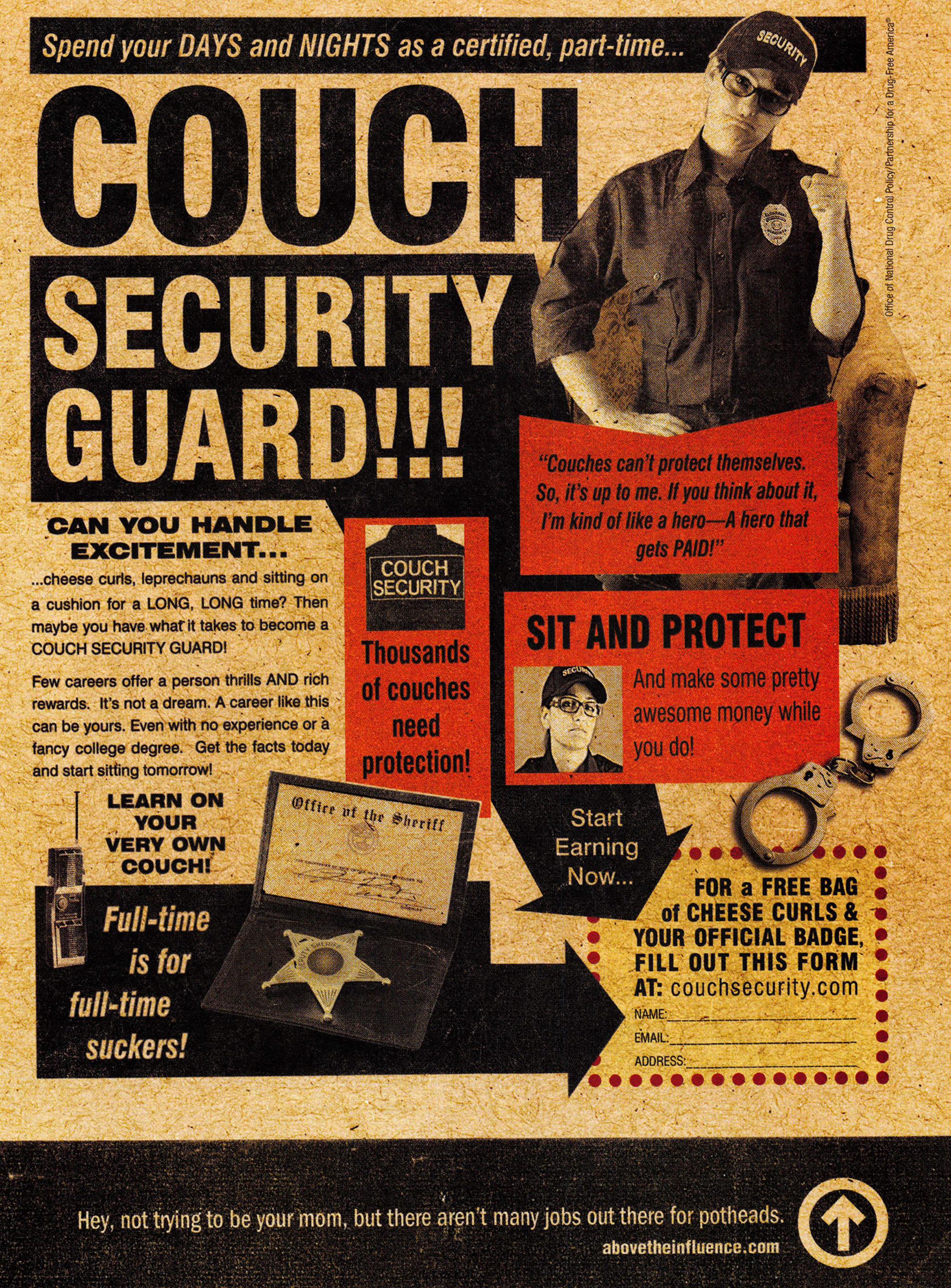
"You let your subscription to Nintendo Power expire? You cannot be serious!"





Player Roster

- John McEnroe (USA)
- Pete Sampras (USA)
- Bjorn Borg (SWE)
- Pat Cash (AUS)
- Stefan Edberg (SWE)
- Boris Becker (GER)
- Michael Stich (GER)
- Chris Evert (USA)
- Martina Navratilova (USA)
- Justine Henin (BEL)
- Lindsay Davenport (USA)
- Roger Federer (SUI)
- Rafael Nadal (ESP)
- Andy Roddick (USA)
- Novak Djokovic (SRB)
- Andy Murray (GBR)
- Jo-Wilfried Tsonga (FRA)
- Kei Nishikori (JPN)
- Lleyton Hewitt (AUS)
- Maria Sharapova (RUS)
- Ana Ivanovic (SRB)
- Serena Williams (USA)
- Venus Williams (USA)



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A new setting, a new visual style, and the Wii MotionPlus.

Ubisoft unsheathes a bold new direction for Red Steel 2.

STEEL

BY STEVE THOMASON

REFORGED

HITTING THINGS IS FUN. That simple truth is the foundation upon which Red Steel 2 is built. As we sit down for an exclusive first look at Ubisoft's hotly anticipated action romp, the first thing creative director Jason VandenBerghe shows us is a picture of two kids dueling with sticks. "This is our core idea," says VandenBerghe. "I remember being this kid in the backyard with my brother. He was two years younger than me, so I always won."

Anyone with similar memories can testify that those weren't just sticks as far as our imaginations were concerned. They were swords (or possibly lightsabers, depending on your age), and we were wielding them in a battle for our very lives. The goal of Red Steel 2 is to bring that fantasy to life by replacing the stick with a Wii Remote controller and putting you in the boots of a badass hero known for now only as The Swordsman. "We want to make a game that satisfies that kid in all of us," enthuses VandenBerghe.

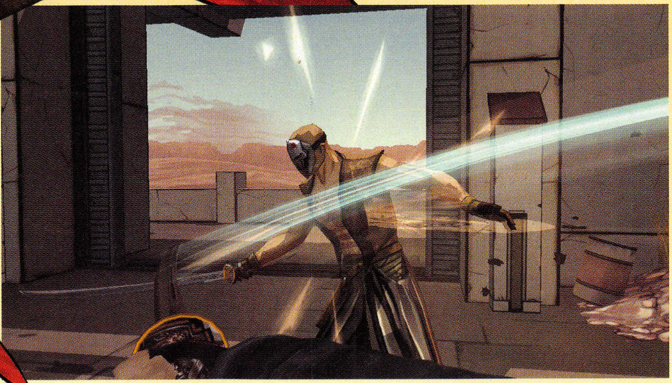
Of course, brandishing the Wii Remote like a sword isn't a new idea. The original Red Steel was the first game to try it, in fact, though most would agree the experience fell short of expectations. "When everyone saw Wii for the first time, swinging the controller like a sword was the first thing that popped into our heads," muses VandenBerghe. "Yet here we are, all these years later, and no one has managed to do it right. It's not because they didn't want to. You just couldn't, given the technology. The Wii Remote just didn't have that in it." So what makes Red Steel 2 different? The Wii MotionPlus accessory. "This cool little device is what makes our game possible," proclaims VandenBerghe with a grin.

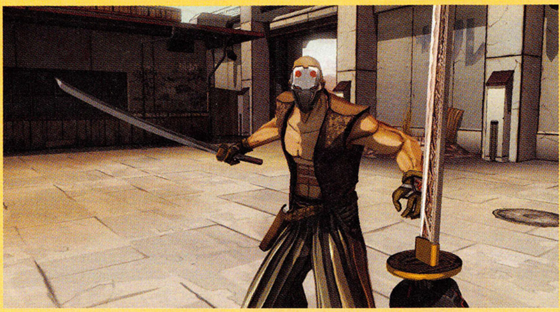
The creative director then gives us an opportunity to try it for ourselves. As we start to beat the snot out of a hapless training dummy, we're immediately struck by the accuracy and sensitivity of the controls. The Swordsman's movements mimic our own exactly, without any noticeable lag. The game also does an amazing job of measuring the power behind each stroke. Softening up your opponent with a few light slashes before unleashing a mighty blow to strike him down proves immensely satisfying. The difference between this and what you would get from the Wii Remote alone truly is night and day—so much so that the game won't be playable without the attachment.

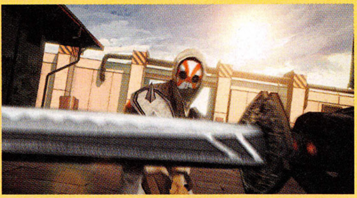
"[Prior to the announcement of the Wii MotionPlus,] we did a lot of prototypes, and the results were OK, but we kept running up against the limits of the Wii Remote," recalls producer Bruno Gallet. "We wanted to do so much more, and we were getting a little bit frustrated. But once we saw the specifications of the Wii MotionPlus, we knew we could do something pretty cool. So to make the most of this new technology, we decided to make it Wii MotionPlus-exclusive."

TERIYAKI WESTERN

As in the original Red Steel, our protagonist also carries a gun. This time, however, shooting and swordplay aren't separated into unique sections. Instead you can switch between the two weapons whenever you so desire. "That was the number-one most requested feature from people who played the first game," acknowledges VandenBerghe. "And we couldn't







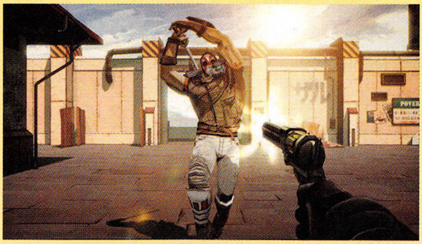
These amazing visuals move at a steady 60 frames per second.

have agreed more." The Swordsman wields his katana by default, and you fire his gun by simply pointing the Wii Remote at your target and pressing the B Button. The transition is seamless and instantaneous, allowing you to string together all manner of blade-and-bullet combos (not entirely unlike in Capcom's critically acclaimed Devil May Cry series).

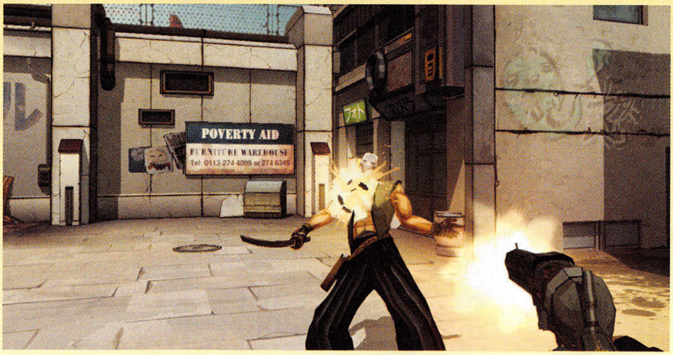
That's far from the only difference between Red Steel 2 and its predecessor, as those who played the first game have likely gleaned from these screenshots. Gone are the yakuza theme and the realistic visual style, replaced by something a bit more fantastical. The action takes place in the fictional town of Caldera, located in the heart of an unspecified American desert. Though it's set in the modern day, this backdrop gives the game a distinct Old West flavor. "Many of those elements are just so evocative," opines VandenBerghe. "It has a certain texture that we really like." One of the identifying characteristics of the original Red Steel, however, was the idea of East meets West, represented by your hero traveling from Los Angeles to Tokyo. The developers are retaining that concept for the sequel by infusing Caldera with Japanese influences. "Think of it like Tokyo meets Reno," offers VandenBerghe. The result is something visually unique, bolstered by some of the most impressive graphics ever seen on the Wii console. Everything is beautifully cel-shaded, with vibrant colors, fantastic lighting, and stunning texture work that give the game a sharp, clean look. It's like a graphic novel come to life, and though it couldn't possibly look more dissimilar to the first game, we applaud the choice.

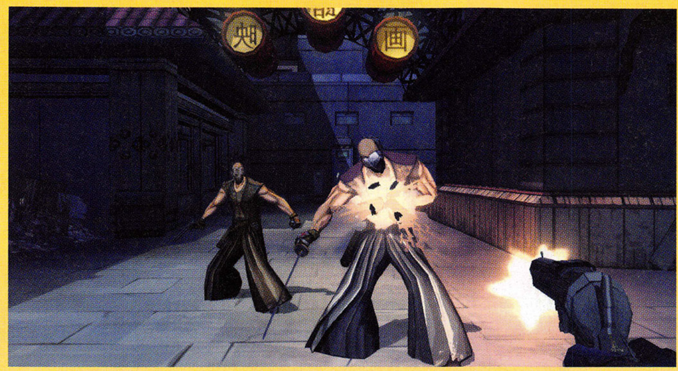
Caldera may be gorgeous, but unfortunately for its citizens, life there is hard, and not just because of the desert heat. The town's ruler is an oppressive shogun, or warlord, whose army of thugs and mercenaries ensure that his word remains law. Naturally, it's up to you as The Swordsman to put an end to this reign of tyranny. In discussing the game's narrative, VandenBerghe stresses his desire to keep things relatively simple. "Red Steel 2 is an action-adventure, but we've had a lot of conversations around how much adventure you really want," he says. "How much story do you want? We think the answer is just enough really great story to get to the action and make it impactful. We're not here to tell a backstory, though. Our hero is like Clint Eastwood in *A Fistful of Dollars*. He's the wanderer who just happens to be passing through." Even without a lot of exposition regarding The Swordsman's past or his motivations, the team is confident they can create a memorable character. As VandenBerghe notes with a laugh, "One thing you know about this guy right off the bat is that he came to town with a sword. That says something."

Obviously, all of this is far removed from the events and personalities of the first game. That wasn't always the case, however. Red Steel 2 was originally designed as a direct sequel that picked up right where its predecessor left off. But when the developers caught wind of the Wii MotionPlus, they decided to essentially start from scratch. "We saw it as a chance to reinvent the brand," recalls Gallet. "So we reconsidered our approach to the entire project." They also took the opportunity to shake up the development staff, which now numbers around 100. "Regarding the changes to the team, we have some people from the first Red Steel and some new people," explains Ubisoft international brand manager Stephanie Langlois. "When the project is evolving as it has over the course of three years, you definitely need to bring in some fresh perspectives.

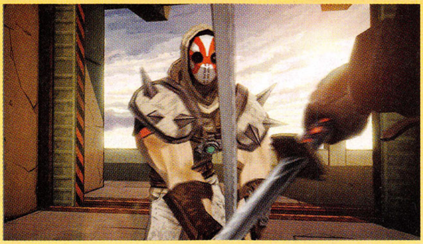


[Above] Someone hasn't seen *Raiders of the Lost Ark*.





Not every enemy in the game brandishes steel. Some prefer hot lead.



It was really helpful to have people like Jason [VandenBerghe] coming over from the US with a totally new point of view. It's good to have that mix. We have new people, who can share their previous experiences, working alongside Red Steel veterans, who have worked on Wii a long time." Despite the overhaul, VandenBerghe teases that there will be some connection between the two games.

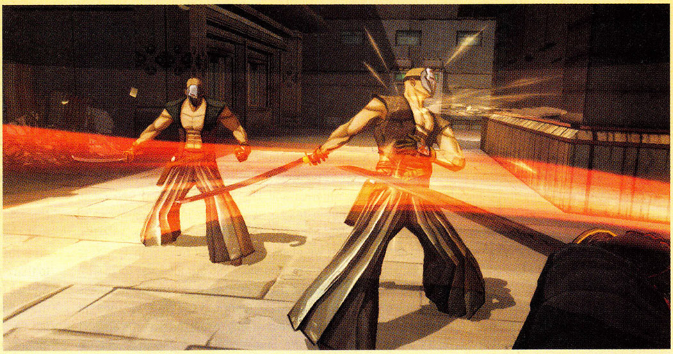
LIVE BY THE SWORD

As The Swordsman roams Caldera, the action plays out at a different pace than in your standard first-person shooter. Rather than a steady stream of foes gunning for you, skirmishes are set up almost like individual set pieces. "We want to give players the freedom to roam around a bit and play at their own pace," says VandenBerghe. "Then when they step into battle, it's on." You'll typically be confronted by one to five enemies at a time, and usually in semiconfined spaces to take full advantage of the swordplay. As VandenBerghe puts it, "Hall-to-hall combat works really well with a shooter, but we want the enemies to get in your face. The combat we're building is more personal. It's sort of like a first-person brawler—you can almost think of our guns as melee weapons."

Your adversaries range from pipe-wielding thugs to armored swordsman and even lightning-fast ninjas, requiring you to modify your approach accordingly. Defeating some opponents is as simple as hitting them before they hit you, while others necessitate a bit more technique. You can block with your katana by holding the A Button and turning the Wii Remote to the desired position. Against certain foes, it's crucial that you block from the proper angle; if your enemy attacks with a vertical strike, for instance, you'll want to hold your blade horizontally else he'll open your guard and leave you vulnerable. You can also parry your opponent's blows by attacking at just the right moment.

When ridding the world of evildoers, there's no harm in bringing a little showmanship to your work. A prompt will appear onscreen once you've dealt your foe a certain amount of damage, and if you press the Z Button quickly, you'll initiate a stylish finishing maneuver. The particulars of the execution depend on your subsequent swing of the Wii Remote, as well as the type of enemy you're facing. One of the finishers we saw had The Swordsman palming his opponent's forehead while running the poor sap through with his blade. Just don't expect copious amounts of blood; the developers are targeting a Teen rating for Red Steel 2. "The gore just doesn't fit for us and what we're trying to do," explains VandenBerghe. "When you put that kind of violence in a game, the game becomes about that kind of violence. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but it's not what we're aiming for. We just want you to have a good time swinging the sword without being distracted by constant decapitations."

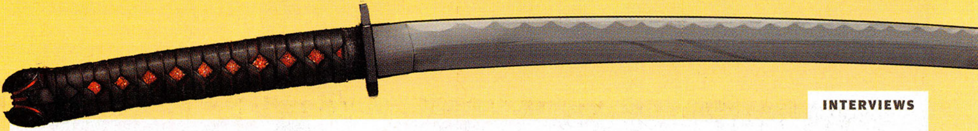
Of course, the other enemies aren't going to stand around while you slice and dice one of their compatriots. They'll use their numerical superiority to try to surround you. "We really want to create the sense that it's important to pick your targets and keep moving," says VandenBerghe. "If you stand still, you're going to be in trouble." The developers aren't looking to put you in lots of long, drawn-out duels (with the exception of boss encounters); they want the battles to feel very kinetic and fast-paced, like something out of *Kill Bill*. If an enemy does get the drop on you from behind,



a warning will flash across the screen when he's about to attack. Press the A Button quickly enough, and The Swordsman will automatically pivot to parry the blow. Need further proof that our hero is one seriously bad hombre? He can also use his katana to block bullets. The team hasn't decided exactly how it will work in the final version, but they don't want it to be a potential gamebreaker, so don't expect to pull it off every time. But the fact that it's even *possible* brings an ear-to-ear grin to our faces.

As you defeat the shogun's minions, your reputation will grow among Caldera's citizens. That fame is represented by The Swordsman's level, and you'll need to achieve a certain standing before you can access new parts of the town. Your travels will also involve light exploration challenges, from figuring out how to open a locked door to running up walls. You'll have the opportunity to tackle optional sidequests, as well, and you can pick up cash to spend on additional equipment or training for new abilities. But VandenBerghe wants to make something clear: "'Simple and powerful' is our goal. We're making a gamer's game, but we want you to be able to pick it up and have a good time right away. That's what Wii is all about. You're going to start out powerful. You don't have to earn the right to be the hero. And you just get even more powerful as you go along."

It all comes back to fulfilling that simple truth: hitting things is fun.



BLADE MASTERS

A chat with the creative leads behind Red Steel 2.

ART DIRECTOR
STEPHANE BACHELET

NINTENDO POWER Why did you decide to go with a very different visual style from the original game?
STEPHANE BACHELET There are a lot of reasons. We wanted this game to just feel more fun. The original game was all about the yakuza and took place in the '70s and sort of had the look of a movie from that era. That doesn't really fit with what we're trying to do here. It's not really a fun look. Also, we really listened to the criticisms regarding the graphics of the first game. And it was really rushed to market; I didn't have much time for reflection while creating the art direction for that title. We did our best, but 10 months isn't much time! [Laughs] Plus, since it was a launch title, we didn't really have a great idea of what Wii was capable of.

Now things are different! We have a lot of experience with the console. And there was a desire among the team to really have a new style; to not be compared to games on the Xbox 360 or PlayStation 3. If you try to do realism on Wii, you'll always be compared to the other systems. So we decided to avoid that kind of comparison by producing a new style.

As you know, one of the themes of the first Red Steel was East meets West. The gun is very American, the katana is very Japanese, and different parts of the game take place in both countries. We wanted to carry that theme over to Red Steel 2, but in a different way—by really combining the two styles into something new. And the graphic-novel look lends itself to that nicely. It's a great way to mix the American and Japanese ambience. Plus, I'm a big fan of comics! [Laughs] I've always wanted to exploit that kind of style in a video game. And there aren't a lot of games that look like this. I mean, you've had cel-shading since Jet Set Radio, but that was very cartoony. Our style is a bit different. Don't get me wrong—I'm a big fan of Jet Set Radio! But our approach was to take that graphic-novel style and give it more of an adult feeling. It's a little more mature.

I also want to mention that this game is running on an all-new engine with a special lighting model created specifically for Red Steel 2. The light and shadow is very sharp, as you'd see in a graphic novel, and that fits perfectly with the desert setting. Initially we were using the same lighting model as the first game, but it just didn't look right. So we went through a lot of iterations to get to where we are now, but I think it's a very important piece of the art direction. In graphic novels, at least the ones that I enjoy, [the aesthetic] is all about light and shadow.

Where did the idea come from for the game's unique setting?
As I mentioned, we wanted to keep that idea of "America and Japan" from the first Red Steel. But instead of simply traveling from America to Japan, we thought, "What if we stay in America, but we inject an American town with Japanese and Asian influence?" So our idea was to go with the archetypal style of each culture: the Japanese samurai and the American Old West. We thought that was the best way to mix the two; the distinct flavors are immediately recognizable. But we wanted to keep it in a modern setting, which gives it another interesting twist.

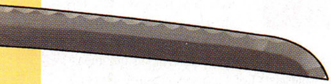
For the art team, is it sort of liberating to work on this type of fantastical setting with stylized visuals rather than something more realistic?
Oh yes. You have to create the universe from scratch. For an artist, that's the dream! It's still believable...we're not making a pure fantasy game. We're using realistic architecture. But at the same time, this particular look doesn't exist in real life. So we have to create it. And that's wonderful!

What are some of your favorite graphic novels, or some that might have influenced you?
There are plenty! [Laughs] It's probably not a surprise that I'm a big fan of *Watchmen* and everything made by Alan Moore. Also, I don't know if he's very famous, but Bill Sienkiewicz. He worked on *Elektra* with Frank Miller. He was one of the first American artists to successfully mix many different graphic styles: pencils, paintings, photos. The first time I saw it, I was just blown away. I also really like Leinil Yu, who's working on *New Avengers*. The way he colors and shades his characters is very close to what we're trying to do with Red Steel 2. We're trying to achieve the same kind of texture with our characters.

So was this new visual style something that was decided on pretty early in development?
Not exactly with the style you see now, but yeah, that's always been the general direction. Just after the release of the first Red Steel, we started to think about what would be cool for the sequel. And we were all convinced that we had to change the graphic style. With the realistic style, we just felt like Sisyphus trying to roll the stone up the mountain. [Laughs]

Can you talk a little bit about your approach to the character design?

We worked closely with Roman and the designers to make sure the player can identify each enemy at a glance. If it's a weak grunt, you should be able to tell right away that you can make quick work of him. Just by the way he's dressed; if he has no armor, for instance. So we talked about that a lot—making the designs appropriate to the function of the enemy. The enforcer you saw earlier, the design isn't finished, but the key word for him was "challenge." When you see him for the first time, you should feel like you're in for a fight. He's covered in armor, so you won't be able to just shoot him. And unlike the grunts, he won't just run up to you. He'll wait for you, sword at the ready, and make you come to him. So we tried to elicit these feelings in the player with the designs.



Also, the enemies have to fit within our setting. They can't just be basic cowboys or basic samurai. They have to feel both Western and Eastern at the same time, and we've gone through a lot of iterations to try to capture that.

LEAD GAME DESIGNER ROMAN CAMPOS ORIOLA

NINTENDO POWER Can you talk about the decision to make Red Steel 2 require the use of the Wii MotionPlus?

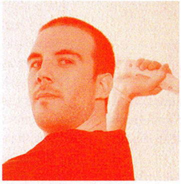
ROMAN CAMPOS ORIOLA One of our core features is the power detection. And for us to be able to measure the power of your swing precisely, we need the Wii MotionPlus.

It sounds like the team sort of struggled with which direction to take early on in the game's development. When you and the team first saw the Wii MotionPlus, did that sort of clarify things for you?

Absolutely. As soon as we saw the Wii MotionPlus, we all said, "That's what we need to do." Up to that point, we had spent a lot of time prototyping and searching for a different way to approach gameplay. We were looking for ways to improve upon the first Red Steel. We always knew we wanted to place a greater focus on the swordplay, though, and when Nintendo showed us the Wii MotionPlus, we were like, "Yes!" With that, we can really make improvements and offer something new. It was great.

We understand that the controls will be customizable to an extent. What can you tell us about that?

At the moment, we plan to have three levels of customization. The first is something we think is essential for a Wii first-person shooter: the ability to customize the rotation speed and the size of the bounding box. [Editor's note: A bounding box is the area of the screen within which you can move your reticle without turning your view.]

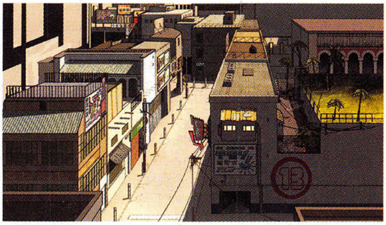


Can you go without a bounding box entirely, if you prefer?

Yes. The second is the ability to choose between an auto lock and a manual lock when it comes to targeting enemies. During first-person melees, we found that people really react differently to each of those options. So we want to offer both. Finally, something we're still working on is the power recognition. At the beginning, we'll have some sort of tutorial where we ask the player to swing hard. And the power recognition will adapt accordingly. Obviously, there's a big difference there between a 13-year-old kid and a grown man, and we need to account for that.

We noticed that you beat the crap out of a car during the demo. How far are you going with destructible environments?

Hmm...that's something I'm not really allowed to talk about yet. [Laughs] The basic idea is that bashing things with a sword is fun. So we plan to have as much destructibility in the environments as we can. It adds a bit of extra visual oomph. We're also building a gameplay mechanic around destructible objects, but I can't say more on that at the moment.



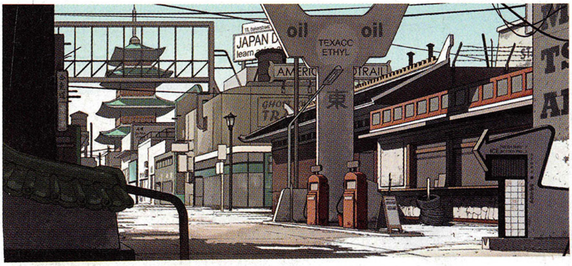
What would you say are the biggest lessons you learned from the development of the first Red Steel, and how have you applied those to the sequel?

I would say that one of the biggest lessons I learned personally has to do with the tutorial. In Red Steel, we were really focusing on the tutorial because of the all-new user interface, but we still didn't do enough. I think that was one of the biggest flaws with the first game. So that's something that we definitely want to improve upon. We want to do a better job of integrating the tutorials into the game...of introducing [the different mechanics] within the flow of the game.

I think the second lesson we came away with was to watch more people play. Get more feedback from players during development. On the first game, it was difficult to get feedback because we just didn't have enough hardware leading up to launch. We couldn't do any big focus groups. With Red Steel 2, we're doing lots of play tests and collecting as much feedback as we can on the controls especially.

Of course, we also looked back at what we had to rush and what we didn't spend enough time on. That's sort of standard when you're making a sequel; to ask what was wrong with the development pipeline and what we need to do to improve that. For instance, we've spent almost a year just working on the controls, and we're still tweaking them.

Also, the ability to switch between the sword and the gun at any time is a huge improvement. We're putting a lot of emphasis on the swordplay at the moment because it was obviously the biggest challenge, but Red Steel 2 is still about the sword and the gun. Rest assured that there will be lots of interesting gunplay, as well.



So is the game built to accommodate different fighting styles, to some extent? Some players will probably prefer to focus on swordplay, while others might be a bit more trigger-happy.

Hmmm. [Confers with Ubisoft PR representative] I have to be a bit careful with what I say here. [Laughs] If you want to play more with the sword or more with the gun, you can. We'll have different weapons in the game, as well as different kinds of abilities with the sword. The player will have the choice to use one more than the other. More on that later. [Laughs]

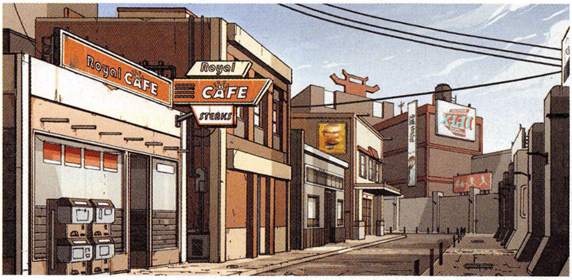
Will the game include any multiplayer modes?

No. Our focus is really on creating a strong single-player experience and taking full advantage of the Wii MotionPlus. Adding multiplayer would detract from that focus. That's another example of something we learned from the first Red Steel. [Laughs]

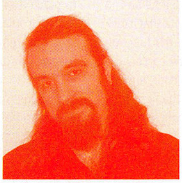
CREATIVE DIRECTOR JASON VANDENBERGHE

NINTENDO POWER Why did you guys choose to go in this new direction with Red Steel 2 rather than create a direct sequel to the first game?

JASON VANDENBERGHE For me, I thought the core mechanic and the power of the gameplay deserved something more dramatic. Something that would be more fun. Red Steel was a fine game at the time and it did its job, but I think there was money left on the table for good drama. The more we explored the new mechanics, the more we wanted to create a unique feel. And...boy, there were a lot of reasons. [Laughs] The quick version is that there were many compelling reasons for us to rethink our setting, our location, our hero, and all of that. And there weren't very many strong reasons to not do that. Nobody we talked to was chomping at the bit to find out what happened at the end of the first Red Steel. They wanted better sword combat. And it seemed like we could find a setting that would make that simpler. Like many things, it just comes back to the gameplay. The setting serves the gameplay, and I think the setting we chose is much better suited to the kind of experience that we want the player to have.



The game has had a somewhat famously long development cycle. How far along was it before the Wii MotionPlus came along, and was that the thing that impelled you guys to essentially start from scratch?



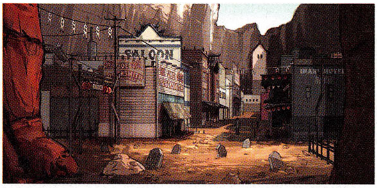
Yeah. The desire to create a sequel to Red Steel has been inside this company since the day [the original game] shipped. Everyone realized there was a lot of leftover potential. But could we make a compelling argument that it was going to be that much better? It all comes back to the gameplay. The Wii Remote is limited in some ways, and sword combat was really hard with the existing controller. So there was a lot of work and development put into different research paths around what we could do. Lots of prototyping, learning about Wii and what we could do with the hardware, etc. But it was when we got the Wii MotionPlus that everything changed and we said, "This is what we were supposed to do all along!" [Laughs] We spent a lot of time scratching our heads, and then when we saw that, it just clicked. That's exactly what we needed to make this really cool. So yeah, it's directly connected to the Wii MotionPlus. That little accessory is the heart of the game.

The decision to go exclusively Wii MotionPlus must have been a bit nerve-racking. Was there a lot of discussion about whether you wanted to take that risk?

Yeah, it's a huge risk. We have no idea what the penetration rate [for Wii MotionPlus] will be. We assume high. We would like it to be high. [Laughs] But yeah, that was a really big deal. I would love to say to you that it'll be compatible with just the regular controller, but the gameplay simply isn't there without Wii MotionPlus. We could give you a crappy version of the game where you just waggle the thing at the screen. But we can't measure the strength, we can't really pick up on the speed very well...it's a mess. It's really hard. It's easy to break, easy to cheat. That core experience just isn't there without the Wii MotionPlus. Also, you know, Red Steel was tied to the release of the Wii console, and it feels appropriate for this game to be tied to the release of the extension. It's a natural fit, in my mind. And it's a compelling argument, right? If we say, "We'll let you play with swords," and the price is right, then people will buy it.

From your perspective, what was the impetus for the change in the visual style?

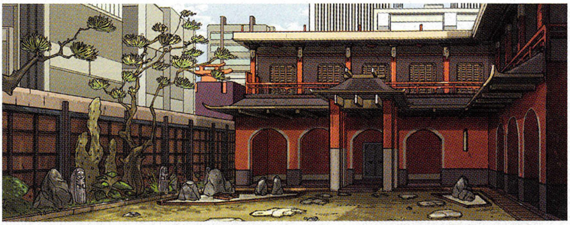
It's really hard to impress people with realistic graphics on Wii. It's not impossible. Resident Evil 4 proves you can do it. But it's really hard. Also, the kind of gameplay experience that we are trying to deliver has a certain arcade-action feel. So [realistic graphics] don't feel right. For me, our gameplay doesn't connect to a really strongly realistic look. We're trying to make a pulp experience, and the look that we have, I think, better reflects that. It lets you relax a little bit. If you had a strongly realistic look, you'd expect lots of dismemberment and decapitations.



We're trying to strike a certain balance. We want to make sure that we have a world where you can believe these are bad guys. We don't want just caricatures. The world is a better place once these enemies are gone. But at the same time, we don't want to push it into the simulation realm. That's just not the way we're going. We want it to be about sparks and explosions and fun. Plus, it's directly connected to gameplay. We're not aiming for a movie experience. We talk about it as a graphic-novel look, but I think of it as a gameplay look. It's what games look like. You see a screenshot of Red Steel 2, and you know it's a game. We're not trying to convince you that it's a movie, because we're making this for gamers. It's for them. And I hope that they'll recognize that and go, "Cool!"

Where did the idea come from to merge the Eastern and Western themes the way that you have?

The last game took place primarily in Japan, but we really wanted this one to be in an American setting. We like the feeling that provides. So we started thinking about that and tried differ-



ent venues and researched different settings. Initially, our settings were a little more traditional, and when we'd show them to people, they'd just be like, "Oh." It just wasn't cool. It didn't excite us and it didn't excite anyone else. But when we just smashed everything together and started showing it to people, they would be like, "Oh, that's kind of neat!" To us, it was kind of a journey of discovery. As we kept trying different things, we found that the more we smashed things together, the cooler it felt.

In your mind, what is Red Steel? What are the core components of the series, and how are those reflected in this game?

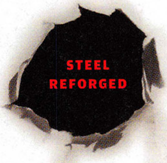
We've had many conversations about this. [Laughs] We've done lots of research, talking to our fans and our not-so-fans. And if you look at Red Steel, what stood out for the audience was, "There's a gun, there's a sword, and it has an Asian feel." Those three elements were the ones that resonated most both with our team and with the audience. And if you step back a bit, it's really about the weapons. Everyone's first question when talking about Red Steel 2 is, "Can I use the sword and the gun at the same time?" That says something important about what Red Steel is at its heart, I think.

So from there, we started to explore what we could add to those core pieces. What spices could we add to bring out their flavor? We tried lots of things, as you always do in preproduction. And we found that the more we talked about the Wild West and Sergio Leone spaghetti Westerns—not exactly those settings, but those themes and those archetypes—the more excited we became and the better the response we got from other people within the company. It felt like adding the Far West to the Far East was a really powerful connection for us in some way. It's hard to put your finger on; I think we're still discovering why it's cool.

Plus, it's right there in our hero. Even the hero in the first Red Steel has a gun in one hand and a katana in the other. Once we changed that gun from a Glock to an Old West revolver, it was like, "Hey, that's cool! Far East meets Far West!" It really was like a discovery.

What would you say have been the biggest challenges with this title?

Going back to your last question...defining Red Steel at a high level was easy. Taking all of the steps that were required to get to where I could say what I just said about the Wild West was really hard. We are, in some ways, attempting to redefine the franchise while retaining its roots. If you're working with a movie license or a long-standing franchise, there are all these rules and constraints. It's different for us. We are blessed with the opportunity to expand on something and take it in a cool new direction. But it's hard.



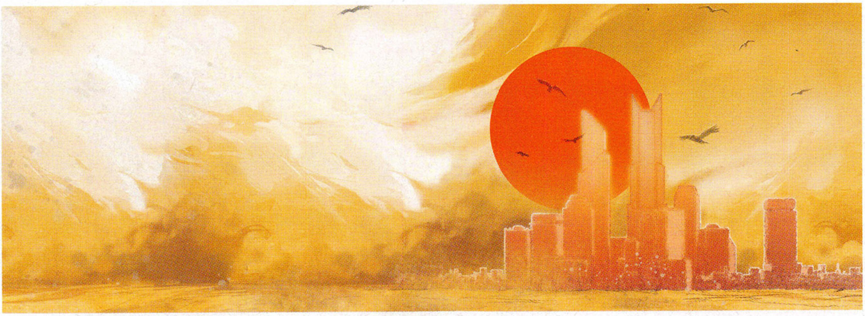
Also, our gameplay is treading into uncharted waters. I know, you read that in every interview. [Laughs] And I don't mean to say that all of our gameplay is brand-new. But that swordplay... there's nothing else like it. So we don't have anything to compare it to. We're pioneering new gameplay, and that's *really* hard. There are no guideposts. It's like hacking our way through the Amazon jungle. So progress on that is one step at a time, and that's been really challenging. It can be nerve-racking. But the team has taken that leap, and I think the results will speak for themselves.

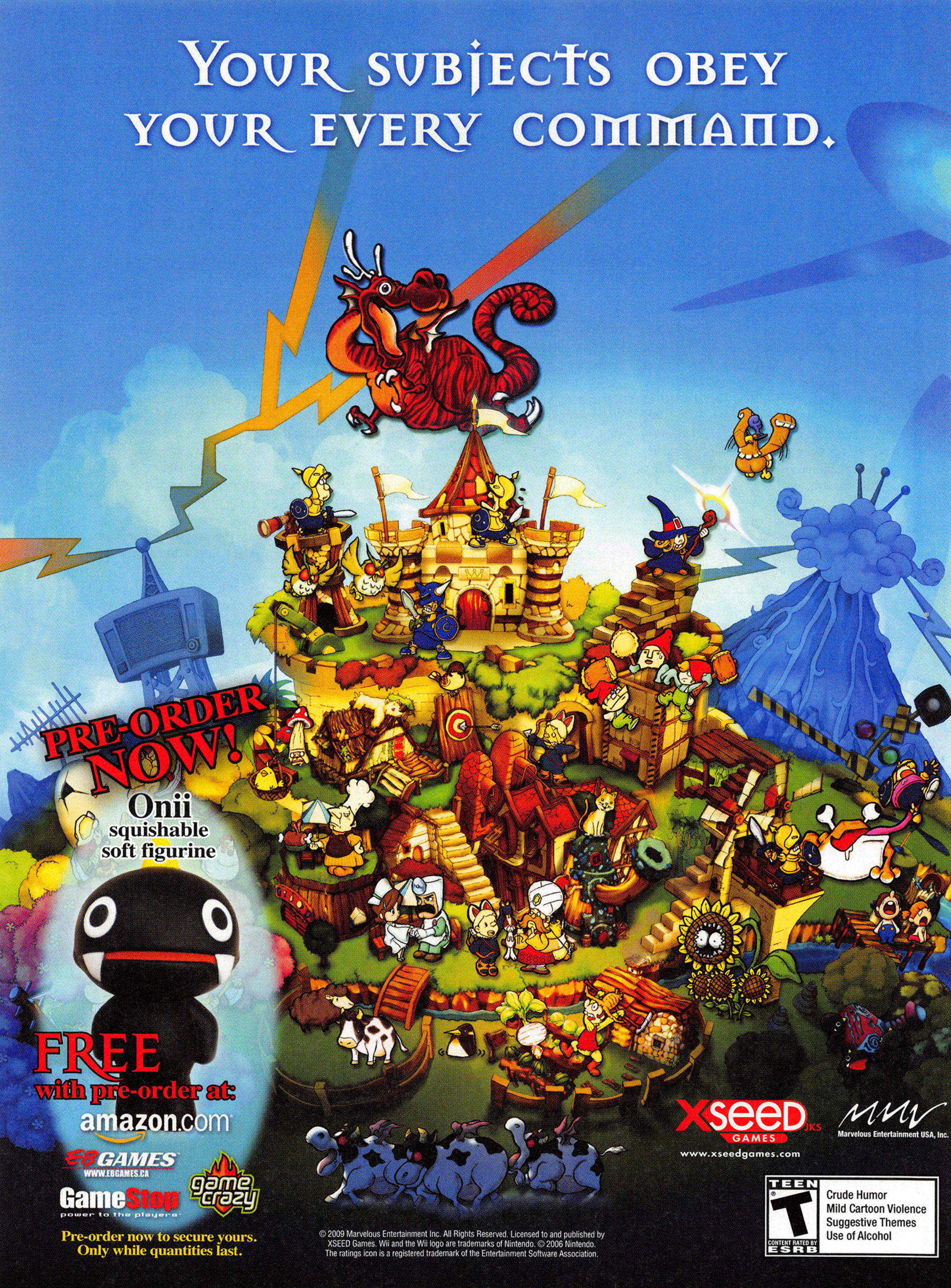
What approach are you taking with the music?

As you'd expect, it's very much a reflection of the setting. We've been experimenting with different themes, and what we've found is that there is a really cool way to mix Eastern and Western music. By picking elements from each, you can create something that sounds honestly unique. We can take the drums and the rhythmic sections of traditional Japanese music, for instance, and layer blues guitar and Western riffs over it, and the result is pretty interesting. Also, I really believe in creating identifying themes for different types of characters so that there's a nice audio association for each one.

What games would you say have influenced the team or might serve as source of inspiration?

Oh, man. There are so many. We have a very diverse group here, which is great. The entire team agrees that the Nintendo approach in games like Metroid Prime or Zelda has the kind of clarity that we strive for. As for looking at games that have something to teach us about what we want to do, I would say Jedi Knight is important. It's really one of the only games that has a set of mechanics that's even close to what we're trying to do, and it's so well done. Also, games like Ratchet & Clank, where the point is just to have fun. Then we look at the way conflict and violence is dealt with in games like Super Smash Bros. and Devil May Cry. The Resident Evil series has lots to teach us...it goes on and on. [Laughs]





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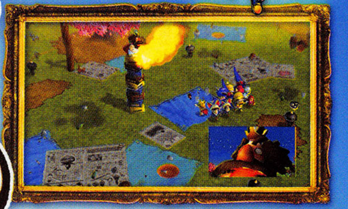
It's good to be the King.



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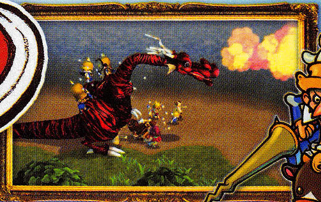
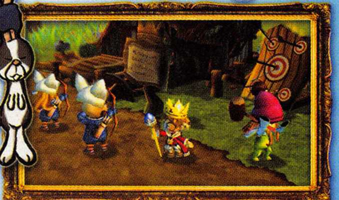
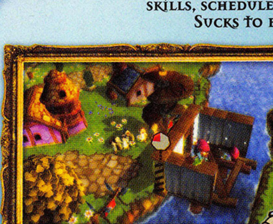
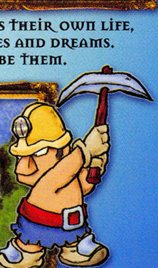


Dangerous beasts are no match for loyal peons.



Each villager has their own life, skills, schedules and dreams. Sucks to be them.





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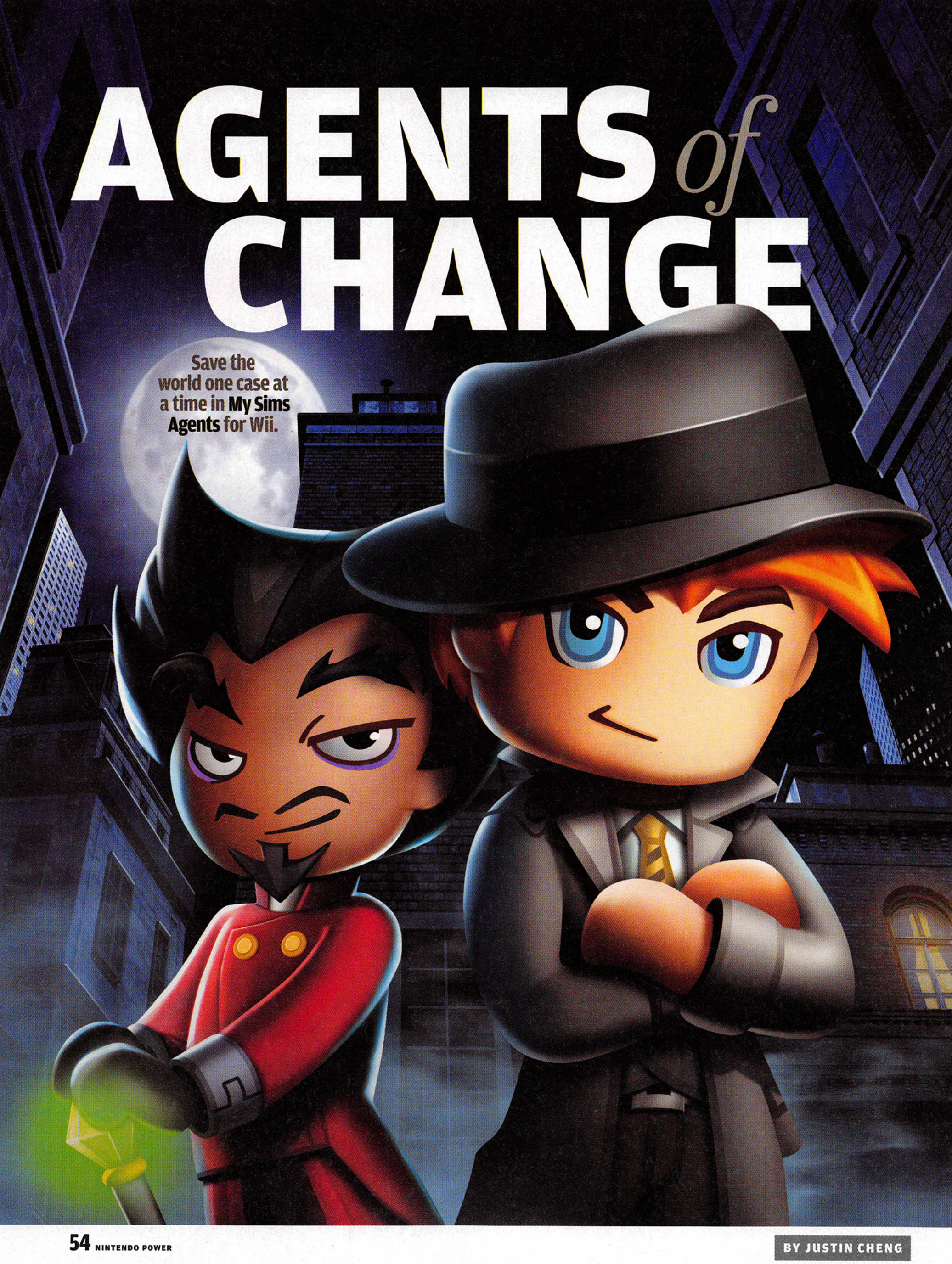


Save the world one case at a time in **My Sims Agents** for Wii.

BY JUSTIN CHENG

"IF YOU LIKE OLD-SCHOOL ADVENTURE GAMES, then you're going to like this one," proclaims Rachel Bernstein, the lead producer on the latest MySims game, MySims Agents. With a statement like that, you can be sure that this is not MySims as you know it. While the visuals and many of the characters are the same, there's a heavy emphasis on story—one of the defining features of point-and-click adventure games—this time around. "When we did [MySims] Kingdom, there was this very lightweight story that was overarching the whole thing," says Bernstein. "And then there were all these different stories on the different islands...but we wanted to take it one step further and have a big story to help you understand your motivation for everywhere that you went—a big epic adventure that had a real ending and a climax and a bad guy that you were working against."

While you may not be an actual archaeologist, you can look like one while exploring this temple.

In MySims Agents, that bad guy is Morcubus, a Lex Luthorish villain who's on a quest to get his hands on the Nightmare Crown, which will allow him to control everyone's minds and send them into a world of nightmares. It's up to you to stop him—in fact, you're a thorn in Morcubus's side from the very first case you solve, in which you deduce whether a dog belongs to Morcubus (no) or a girl named Poppy (yes). "It's the fact that you've been able to stand up to Morcubus and solve the case that gets you admitted into the Sim Protection Agency," MySims Agents lead designer Hunter Howe tells us.

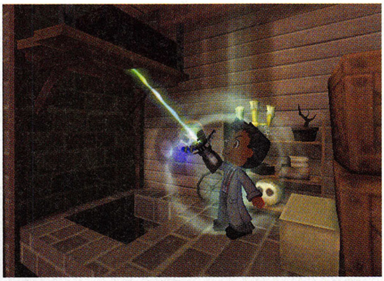
Once you become an agent, you'll be gallivanting across the globe (in your own harrier jet, no less), searching for clues and about the Nightmare Crown. As it turns out, a large piece of the crown is the Fortunite crystal, which is located in a mansion in the bayou. Obviously, you want to make sure Morcubus doesn't get his hands on it, but things never go as smoothly as planned. The crystal is broken, so it becomes your job to find out who did it by questioning all the potential suspects (a group of people who have gathered there for the reading of the mansion-owner's will). "It's sort of a MySims first, and also sort of a Sims first, in that we're giving you as the player a voice in the story and you can pick what kind of questions you want to ask," comments Howe. "Usually in The Sims, you're a guy speaking gibberish, but now...[it's] almost like an RPG that would have dialogue trees that you have to navigate through to get the information you want out of people."

FOLLOW THE EVIDENCE

Of course, talking gets you only so far—as Gil Grissom (from the TV show *CSI*) said, "I tend not to believe people. People lie. The evidence doesn't lie." Fortunately, you have a wide array of evidence-gathering gadgets at your disposal. Bernstein shares, "You start out as a humble detective, and you've got a crowbar, a magnifying glass, and a wrench. As the game goes on, those gadgets get upgraded." For example, your magnifying glass evolves into a footprint detector—handy for investigating the crime scene since you can follow the footprints back to their source.

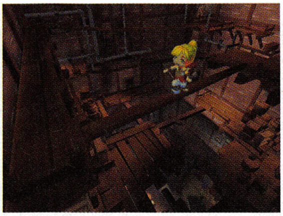
In addition to following footprints, you need to find out how the Fortunite crystal was broken in the first place—and that means doing some research in the library. Sadly, the library is locked, but luckily you're equipped with the Uber Techno-Tool, which allows you to pick locks via a puzzle minigame. Your goal is to move the Uber Techno-Tool's key to the right

[Right] If objects and areas are out of reach, use your handy-dandy gadgets to gain access to them.

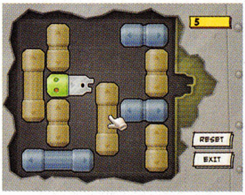


HOME *Sweet* HOME

Between solving cases, you can visit your headquarters, where you can don one of many outfits (as you can at mirrors placed throughout the game), plus other, more important things. Lead designer Hunter Howe elaborates: "HQ really serves as your home base throughout the game. You keep coming back here, and the story keeps progressing. But this is also the place where I really get to build out my team and deck out this place how I want to. Also it's the place where I send out people on dispatch missions. They're actually a really important part of the game. As I build up a crew of agents here, I can actually give them missions, and they'll leave and they'll text me on my phone with various updates. They'll be like, 'Oh, I'm on a stakeout right now. Nobody's showing up. What do I do?' And you can give them advice just through your phone, which is a lot of fun."



[Above] Sometimes you'll have to cross beams while moving the Control Stick left or right to maintain your balance.



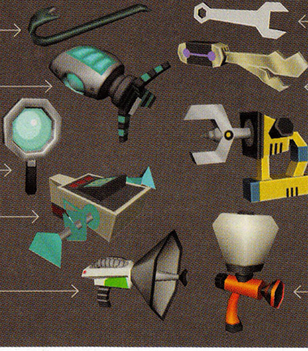
side of the screen by sliding the interfering blocks out of the way. Once you have access to the library, you can find the book that tells you Fortunite is vulnerable only to a silver hammer.

The primary suspect, then, is the butler named Zombie Carl (yes, he's an actual zombie), who has a toolbox that holds a silver hammer. After solving another sliding puzzle to unlock the toolbox, you play a minigame that Howe calls a "miniature chemistry lesson" to find out if there's any evidence of Fortunite on the hammer. You arrange atoms, each with a different number of bonds, in such a way that no atom has open bonds. (It sounds more complicated than it is.) After solving this puzzle, you discover that there is some Fortunite residue on the tool. If you look in your case book at this point, you'll see one thumbprint next to Zombie Carl's name. Bernstein explains, "As you go through the game, you're piling up evidence. In this particular quest, once you got to three thumbprints against someone's name, that would prove enough for you that it was them."

The case book is an invaluable part of the MySims Agents experience, as it gives you hints about your goals. "These reminders that we're giving the player, they're sufficiently vague to remind you, 'Oh, yeah, maybe I should start asking people some things,' but it doesn't necessarily tell you, 'Go talk to so-and-so to move on in the game,'" Howe adds. "We want the player to really feel clever by figuring out the story, but we also don't want them to get stuck unnecessarily." But don't take that to mean there's only one way to go about solving a case. Relates Bernstein, "It's a linear story of trying to figure out, in this case, who broke the Fortunite crystal, but there's lots of different paths that you can go down...and the way that I figure out and play it is going to be different than the way that you do

TOOLS *of the* TRADE

Gadgets are important in any agent's arsenal, but you won't always have the tools you need right away. Thankfully, your gadgets can get upgraded over time.



CROWBAR: Your basic tool for smacking stuff and prying things open.

F-SPACE MANIPULATOR: Upgrade your crowbar, and you'll have this handy device, which you can use to channel Fenergy to move objects.

MAGNIFYING GLASS: Another basic tool, which is used to find footprints.

DETECTOR: Once you get this, you can throw out your magnifying glass; the Detector can find footprints *and* identify faint smells.

SUPER DETECTOR: This does everything the Detector does and more—it can also find trails of sound.

WRENCH: You can use this basic tool to fix stuff.

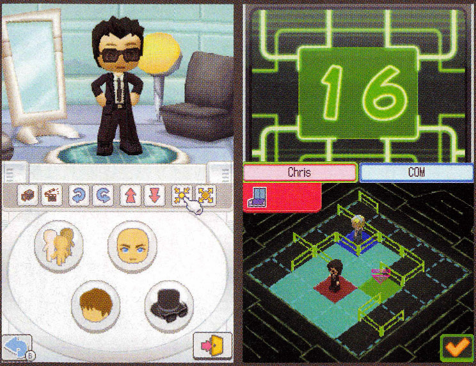
MULTI-TOOL: Forget about the wrench—the multi-tool is like a Swiss Army Knife on steroids. You have pretty much every tool you could ever want, including a lockpick.

UBER TECHNO-TOOL: You can use this upgraded Multi-Tool to hack into computers.

PAINT GUN: This isn't used for cases, but rather to paint the floors and walls of your headquarters.

MOBILE AGENTS

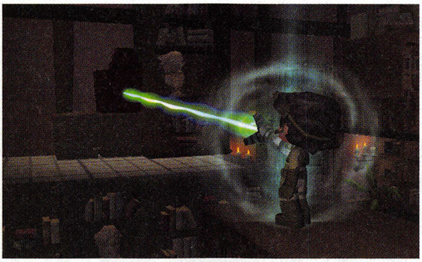
In addition to MySims Agents for the Wii console, Electronic Arts has a version on the way for the Nintendo DS handheld. It's no mere port, however: "To deliver a unique experience on the DS, it has its own story, mystery, and agents running around," explains Ken Ogasawara, lead producer on the DS version. "The main plot element is that a mysterious thief is out to steal an ancient treasure, and the player, a special agent, is assigned to protect the treasure and to apprehend the suspect before it's too late. The player will be joined by a sidekick to help out in the puzzle-solving while meeting a whole cast of other MySims characters." The DS version retains the franchise's signature customization (you can mold the town as well as your character and headquarters), and it also has 10 minigames—some multiplayer—that are available to play at anytime.



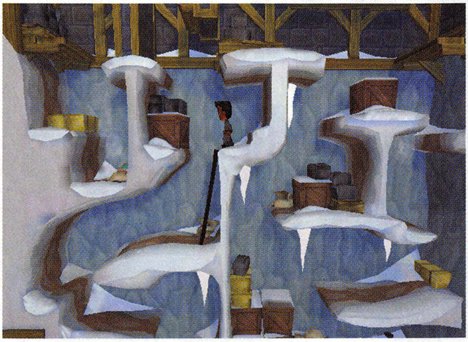
and the way Hunter does. Who do you decide to talk to, what leads do you decide to follow; sometimes you can skip a whole part because you figured out something faster than someone else did."

BUILD IT BETTER

With this emphasis on story, it's easy to forget that two of the central features of the MySims franchise are customization and building. The former is best illustrated by your headquarters (see the "Home Sweet Home" sidebar), whereas the latter plays a key role in the gameplay. Instead of MySims Kingdom's magic wand, you have an upgraded crowbar called the F-Space Manipulator. While standing on certain glowing spots in the environment, you can use the Manipulator (by pointing at the screen with the Wii Remote controller) to grab, move, rotate, and set down objects, granting you access to previously unreachable areas. For example, as you're trying to reach the attic (where Zombie Carl resides), you use the F-Space Manipulator to stack crates so that you can jump to a higher platform. Thankfully, you don't have to worry about fussing with the camera. Bernstein tells us, "When we looked at [MySims] Kingdom...there were some usability issues with controlling the camera.... We thought hard about [it]—if we take away the camera control, what do we lose and what do we gain? And we gain a lot.... For more casual players, we could always put the camera in the right space. You're looking in the correct direction, you're standing far enough away, you're seeing the stuff you need to see right now to solve the problem."

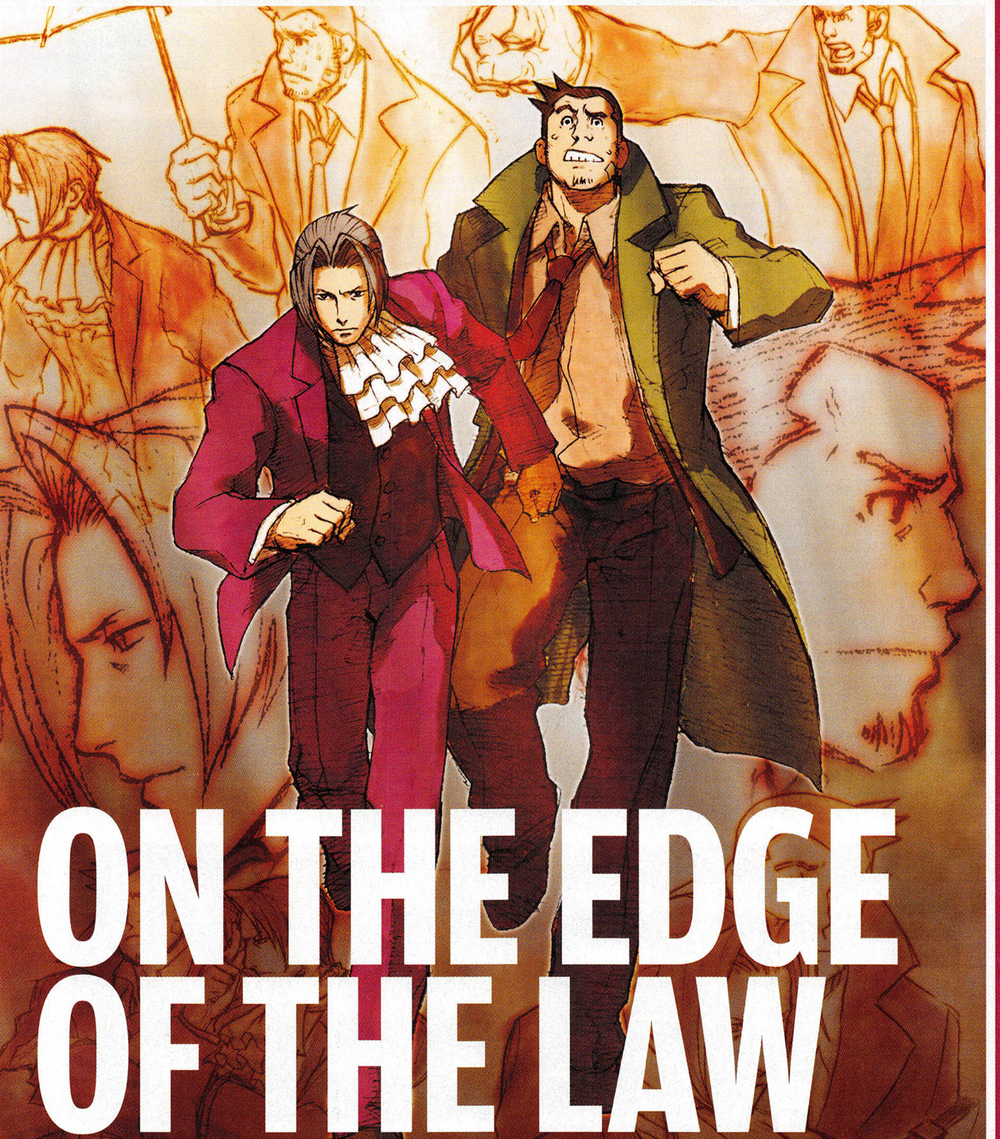


It's apparent that the developers have learned a lot from their experience, and they're using that knowledge to create a deeper MySims game that is not just for young or casual gamers, but gamers of all kinds. "There's something certainly about the characters that makes it feel like it's a game aimed towards young people, but the way that they act and the things that they say and the problems that they have are all completely relatable by anybody," Howe assures us. "And I think that it's something that you see in a Pixar movie where it's appealing to kids and it's appealing to the adults who are there—and in our case, playing with their kids in the living room or somebody older who's picking up the game to play ...there's something for them to appreciate there." We'll find out if that's the case when MySims Agents hits this fall.



[Left] You may have to shift boxes around in order to progress through the 2-D platformer-style bits.

PHOENIX WRIGHT'S RIVAL IS BACK AND STARRING IN HIS OWN DS GAME—ACE ATTORNEY INVESTIGATIONS: MILES EDGEWORTH.



ON THE EDGE OF THE LAW

BY CHRIS HOFFMAN

Sometimes friends, always rivals, defense attorney Phoenix Wright and prosecutor Miles Edgeworth are flip sides of the same coin. But while Phoenix held the lead role in the first three Ace Attorney point-and-click adventure games (and played a supporting role in the fourth), the more-reserved Edgeworth has avoided the spotlight, becoming a playable character for only a brief period when Phoenix was out of commission. But as the game's title indicates, that's changing in Ace Attorney Investigations: Miles Edgeworth, which puts you in full control of the ruffle-wearing, magenta-clad prosecutor for an all-new type of lighthearted criminal drama.

According to producer Motohide Eshiro, the idea of taking the Ace Attorney series in a new direction occurred to him during the development of the franchise's third title. "When I was working on Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Trials and Tribulations," he explains, "I got the idea to create a new game based on the same universe. I chose Miles as the protagonist because of his solid fan base both domestically and overseas, and also his logically sharp and cool detective style. It perfectly fits this newest title."

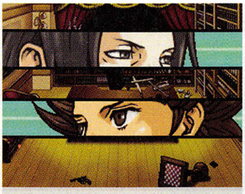
As Eshiro implies, Ace Attorney Investigations focuses squarely on the crime-scene detective work that has always been a part of the Ace Attorney games, only now you're investigating with the police on your side (they were always reluctant to help do anything to defend suspected criminals in past Ace Attorney games), and you're doing it from a third-person perspective in which you guide your protagonist around the crime scenes instead of just clicking on objects. You won't get any verdicts, but you will seek truth and justice as you collect evidence to expose the guilty parties.

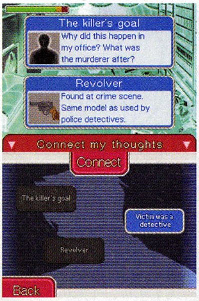
"There will be no courtroom battles involved in Ace Attorney Investigations," Eshiro affirms, "[but you can] talk to others, investigate crime scenes, and collect evidence and other information. There are clues that are full of contradictions that are hidden at the crime scenes. By challenging the contradictions with collected evidence, the players can open up a new path in their investigations that may even lead to a surprise [outcome]."

PROVING YOUR WORTH

By using the touch screen or the Control Pad, you'll move Edgeworth around an assortment of environments, ranging from his office—where he returns after a month-long business trip only to discover that a murder has taken place—to an amusement park to an airplane. You'll also be able to look for clues and talk to witnesses by pressing A, and grab items by pressing X.

After you collect enough info and evidence, you can press the L Button to enter Logic mode. While Phoenix Wright had his magatama and Apollo Justice had his brace-





The killer's goal

Why did this happen in my office? What was the murderer after?

Revolver

Found at crime scene. Same model as used by police detectives.

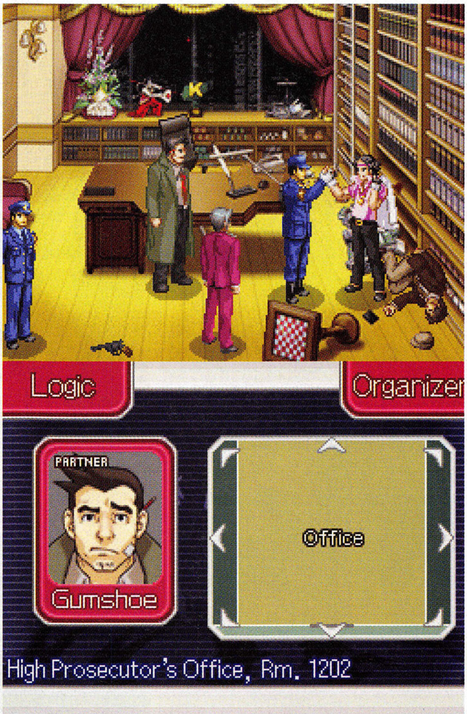
Connect my thoughts

The killer's goal

Victim was a detective

Revolver

[Above] Logic mode lets Edgeworth piece together clues to uncover new information.



PARTNER

Gumshoe

Office

High Prosecutor's Office, Rm. 1202

Edgeworth

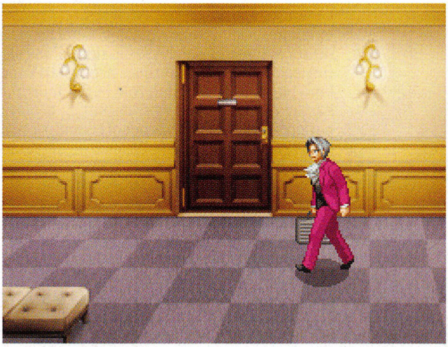
There is a very glaring contradiction here!

let, Miles Edgeworth merely uses his wits in Logic mode to combine facts and yield conclusions.

"[Logic mode] is a system that reflects Miles's cognition and conception...[and it] gives insight into Miles's cool and logical way of thinking," states Eshiro. "The mode allows [players] to deduce and select related pieces of information to further discover new information and evidence they can use to solve the case. This gameplay will provide the players the joy of discovery, sort of like gathering new information and evidence and reaching a new level on their own."

You can't just leap to conclusions, however. Though a correct deduction can crack a case wide open, an incorrect guess will have a negative impact. "If the player fails to find the right combination of information in Logic mode, or confronts contradictions with the wrong set of evidence, a gauge for measuring truth will decrease," Eshiro elaborates. "When it drops down to zero, the truth of the case will be forever kept in the dark. Game over."

Once you're properly armed with knowledge, it's time to initiate the other major gameplay component: suspect confrontations. Similar to witness cross-examinations in previous Ace Attorney games, these battles of wits allow Edgeworth to break through lies by exposing contradictions in suspects' explanations, thus bringing you ever closer to revealing the culprit. Confrontations also give you a chance to yell the trademark Ace Attorney voice commands—"Objection!" "Hold it!" and "Take that!"—into the microphone, plus the game features a brand-new voice command—"Eureka!"—which is apparently used in Logic mode.



THE UNUSUAL SUSPECTS

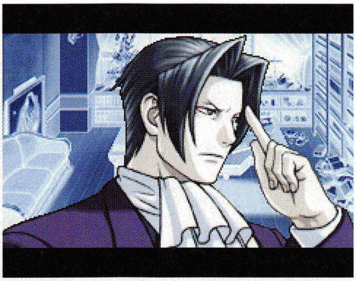
Since Edgeworth has the full support of the police and the prosecutor's office behind him, he usually has a partner backing him up. Not only do partners provide advice on the case, but they're playable, as well. Your partner changes from chapter to chapter; in the game's opening scenes, you're backed up by frequently befuddled police detective Dick Gumshoe. Later you're aided by an all-new character—a 17-year-old self-proclaimed "thief of truth" by the name of Kay Faraday. Every Ace Attorney star needs a perky female sidekick, right? Although the energetic Kay looks like a modern-day ninja, she's about

LADIES' NIGHT

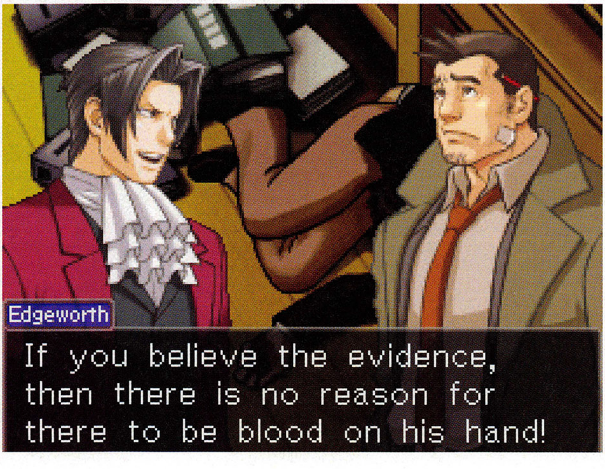
The Ace Attorney series is remarkably popular in Japan—so much so that it has spawned manga, several concerts, and most recently a live-action musical. If you think that Phoenix and Edgeworth look a bit feminine in the images shown here, you're correct—Takarazuka Revue, an all-female performance troupe, is responsible for the production. Set at a time when Edgeworth will stoop to any level to get a guilty verdict, the story centers on Phoenix and Edgeworth duking it out in court while a new character, Phoenix's childhood sweetheart, is on trial.

TOMU
RANJU
as
PHOENIX
WRIGHT

HIKARU
NANAHO
as
MILES
EDGEWORTH

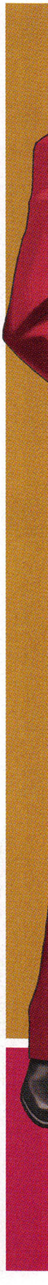


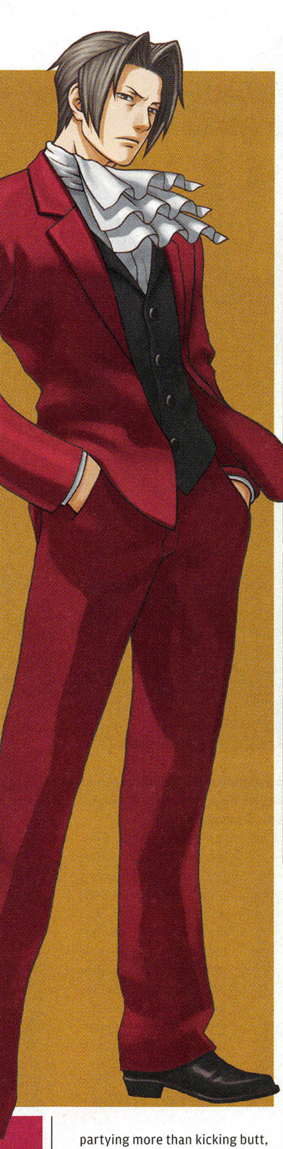
[Above] Edgeworth's uncanny cognitive powers have apparently yielded something very interesting on his index finger.

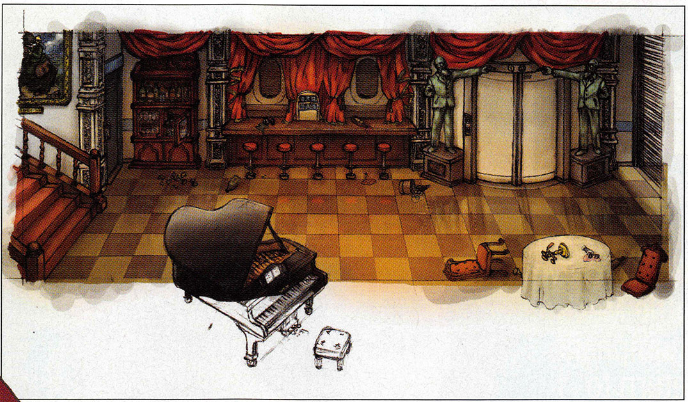


Edgeworth

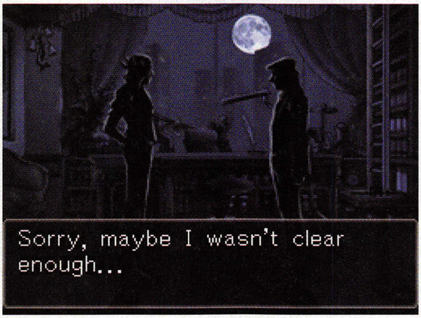
If you believe the evidence, then there is no reason for there to be blood on his hand!



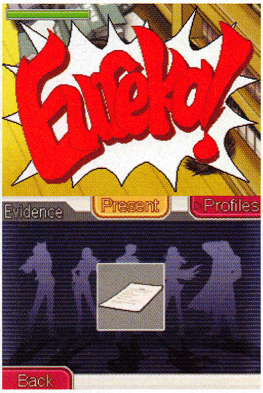




As the concept art above illustrates, Ace Attorney Investigations unfolds in a variety of detailed locations. Chairs are knocked over, bottles are shattered, and mysteries abound.



Sorry, maybe I wasn't clear enough...



partying more than kicking butt, and more importantly, she supports Edgeworth with a special virtual-reality-style tool.

The gizmo lets Edgeworth use his knowledge to reconstruct a crime scene even if it's been disturbed. If you encounter a situation in which evidence has already been removed or altered in some way, you'll be able to use the machine to reproduce the scene as it originally was, and use that virtual representation to find contradictions. The more you learn, the more faithfully the crime scene will be replicated, allowing you to advance the case.

Of course, Kay isn't the only new face you'll encounter. In addition to meeting numerous minor characters, you'll cross paths with an aggressive but charismatic international police agent and his lovely but cold female assistant. The flashy officer acts as Edgeworth's rival in Ace Attorney Investigations; their differing methods and personalities will doubtlessly lead to some amusing clashes.

Since the game is set both before and after Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney Trials and Tribulations, you can expect several familiar characters to show up as well. Long-winded crone Wendy Oldbag (who harbors a disturbing crush on Edgeworth) has been shown in some concept sketches, and Edgeworth's sister figure—whip-wielding prosecutor Franziska von Karma—plays a prominent role.

As for other characters, like Edgeworth's childhood friend Larry Butz or Phoenix Wright himself? "We have a plan to bring back many more of the familiar characters from the Ace Attorney series, but can't talk about them just yet!" Eshiro teases. "You'll see them as key characters or see them where you don't expect them to be, as a surprise. It'll be fun!"

Other details about the game are tightly under wraps—Capcom hasn't even revealed the release date other than saying it's coming this winter—but all the evidence points to another quality title that Eshiro expects will appeal to point-and-click-adventure fans and especially to faithful Ace Attorney veterans.

"Ace Attorney fans, I'm happy to present you a new story with Miles Edgeworth as the star," he announces. "You will be led to the wonderful Ace Attorney universe by directly controlling Miles and utilizing his cool detective experience in Logic mode. There will be plenty of surprises and fun for you to look forward to. Thank you for your support, and stay tuned!"

INTERVIEW | CHAD YORK | AKIYA SAKAMOTO | KENSUKE TANABE | BRYCE HOLLIDAY

DEFENDING *the* TITLE

The story behind Little Mac's triumphant return to the ring in Punch-Out!! for Wii

IT TAKES A LOT of hard work to stage a comeback, especially after a 15-year retirement. Thankfully, gaming's favorite underdog, Little Mac, had an incredibly talented team in his corner for the development of Punch-Out!! for the Wii console, ensuring that the pint-sized champ lives up to his glory days in this new title run. (For our full review, see page 88.) We sat down with the key people behind the classic series' new installment to discuss early prototypes, the importance of personality, what makes the Punch-Out!! games special, and the pressure to live up to the series' storied history.

NINTENDO POWER **Why make a new Punch-Out!! game now, 15 years after the last one?**

KENSUKE TANABE The reason that we haven't done another Punch-Out!! before now is that, since I've been so busy with other things, I only just noticed that it had been 15 years. [Laughs] I'm joking, of course. We're doing a new version now because we felt that a Punch-Out!! game would be a great opportunity for us to utilize the Wii console's motion control features.

Did the idea for a new Punch-Out!! game come about very early then, such as when Wii was first announced?

BRYCE HOLLIDAY At Next Level Games, when we heard the [Wii] announcement at E3 a few years ago, almost instinctively we started thinking about the Punch-Out!! franchise. Just the intuitiveness of punching, and [the fact that this was] an old classic franchise that us fans wanted to bring back; it seemed like there was a very good possibility we could do this.

PUNCH-OUT!!
PUNCH-OUT!!
Wii

Chad York Audio Director, Next Level Games

Akiya Sakamoto Coordinator, NCL

Kensuke Tanabe Producer, NCL

Bryce Holliday Gameplay Director, Next Level Games

From your perspective, what is the "essence" of Punch-Out!!? Why do you think the series still resonates with fans today?

HOLLIDAY I think Punch-Out!! is a classic series because it's an underdog story; it's David versus Goliath. Everyone in the world can identify with some part of Little Mac and his struggle against these stereotypical bullies; these larger-than-life, over-the-top, bad-guy personalities. It's a Rocky, underdog-type story that matters today just as it did in the '80s.

There have been similar arcade-style boxing games in the years since, but none of them have caught on like Punch-Out!!. What do you think sets Punch-Out!! apart?

CHAD YORK Punch-Out!! is a puzzle game at heart, and it plays up the story of the characters' personalities, which are the things that the other boxing games tend to miss. You're not as connected to those other games because the

BY CHRIS SLATE

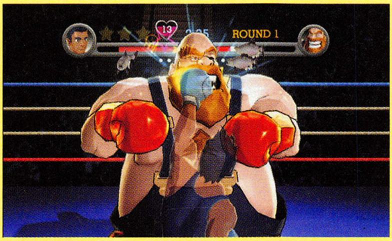
> “Punch-Out!! is a puzzle game at heart, and it plays up the story of the characters' personalities, which are the things that the other boxing games tend to miss.” –CHAD YORK

characters don't have a lot of depth; you're not as entertained or as puzzled with how to finish the fight; those games are more about stats and the twitch-based kind of stuff; it's not really about the story.

TANABE Strictly speaking, Punch-Out!! is not a boxing game; the focus is more on the puzzle element of the fights and how to improve your own skill. So, the gameplay is different from other boxing games.

Did you ever consider taking the series into a more realistic direction with the Wii version? Because, for example, as shown in Wii Sports Boxing, you now have the option for more of a 1:1 control style.

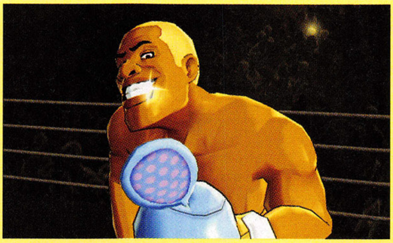
HOLLIDAY At the beginning of this project we had an experimental prototype phase where we explored a lot of the ideas of Punch-Out!! and researched what we could do. I think one gameplay mechanic that resonates with Punch-Out!! is that you're standing behind Little Mac. Most punching games nowadays are like Street Fighter, where you're seeing yourself from the side, and the attachment of seeing a punch coming toward you is slightly different. Whereas the Punch-Out!! series works because it's basically the essence of the strategy of boxing: waiting for your opportunity, timing your punches, working on your combinations, and trying to avoid hits. This style avoids all of the button mashing and other kinds of versus-fighter mechanics. So, that's why Punch-Out!! is still popular today, as it was in the '80s.



Despite 21st-century graphics, the classic gameplay remains wholly intact.

Any time that a beloved series like Punch-Out!! is given to, or done in association with, another development team, fans are always a little nervous since the games don't always live up to their pedigree. Did you feel a lot of pressure to deliver the kind of Punch-Out!! that fans have been waiting for?

HOLLIDAY We were excited, and we also felt the pressure to make this game, even before it was announced to the public. We are really big fans of the series; I've played every version. I even remember the old arcade games at the local convenience marts. So, we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to make this the highest-quality experience, and also to keep a lot of the core mechanics and the fun of the original games. It's great, as fans, to be able to make this game; we really got to explore what the series was about and then create our take on what it meant. So, the pressure is great, and we've definitely been feeling it and we're feeling it now, but it's exciting to give our version of what the game meant to us, as kids, to this new generation.



Nailing each character's distinct personality was a crucial step in creating Punch-Out!!

YORK We're always our own biggest critics. Whether it's a new, unknown project or one that has history, both types have their challenges. If no one knows the brand at all, it's extremely challenging because you have to create something memorable that will challenge the users and is entertaining. So, it's just a different challenge, creatively. We beat ourselves up to make the best product. There's definitely pressure, no matter what, and it's self-imposed on our team.

Was it a challenge to add motion controls to the gameplay, or did it flow really easily during development?

YORK The early prototypes of the gesture controls took a lot of tuning to get to feel right. It was really important to us to make the game accessible to the casual audience, so it needed to feel natural. We wanted people to embrace the motion controls; we didn't want to just have them in as a kind of side feature that you could play with—we wanted them to be as competitive as if you played with the classic controls. A lot of the development team started testing and building the game with the classic controls, but once we had the gestures tuned to the way that they are in the game today, most people find more satisfaction playing the game that way now.

I was really impressed by how well the motion controls work, so I don't think anyone should complain.

TANABE Thank you!

HOLLIDAY We hope so, too! [Laughs]

The game seems to take its inspiration from the NES Punch-Out!!; most of the characters are from that game and there are only a couple of nods to the Super NES version. Why was this?

HOLLIDAY We researched the entire series, and we realized that one of the main elements of the franchise was the story of Little Mac, and he doesn't appear in the Super Punch-Out!! universe. We think that the connection between him and Doc Louis [Mac's trainer] was the core reason that the NES game was better received than [its sequel]. Super Punch-Out!! has a little bit of a different visual style; you're a little closer to the characters, the animations are a little more over-the-top, and it's a little cartoony. Those were the big pluses we saw when playing and reviewing that game, so we wanted to bring those updated presentation elements

> “We put a lot of pressure on ourselves to make this the highest-quality experience, and also to keep a lot of the core mechanics and the fun of the original games.” –BRYCE HOLLIDAY

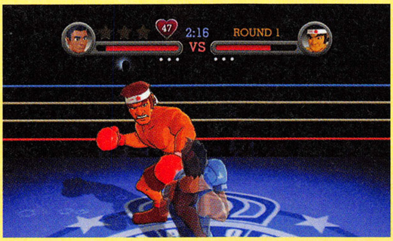
to the [NES game]. So, I'd say the core gameplay mechanic and the Little Mac story come from the NES version, but some presentation and visual style elements come from Super Punch-Out!!, as well as a few features that originated from the arcade versions, such as stars and hearts. [We took the best parts] from everywhere.

What was the thinking behind adding the pre-match story sequences and presenting them via still, 2-D-images?

HOLLIDAY We wanted to add a little more backstory and depth to the characters. On the Web there's a lot of fan fiction and people hypothesizing about what these [characters] are like in the real world; what happens between the bouts in the ring. So we wanted to give people a taste—not a whole complex story arc—but something that would give people more insight into the personalities, because really, [Punch-Out!!] is a game about those personalities.

Those personalities really show in the ring, through all of the great animations and facial expressions.

HOLLIDAY Yeah. The things that people remember [about the series] are the King Hippos and the Von Kaisers; they remember the attitude of the characters, even in the limited form that they saw them in before. So, with Wii and 22 years of history, we were able to add more character depth and broaden the personalities of these bullies. That was the most exciting part for us in designing the game: how to tell more of their story. The montages are a simple, little piece, and during the fight the characters talk to you and insult you. Certain characters have more of a bad-boy attitude and will be meaner, whereas other characters don't care about Little Mac; he's insignificant [to them]. It all relates to the different kinds of bullies that an underdog would experience.



Subtle cues—such as an opponent flashing red—offer hints.

There have been a few tweaks to the classic formula that I really appreciate—for example, not having to go back to the beginning of a circuit when you lose. Were changes like that done to make the game user-friendly, or was there another reason?

HOLLIDAY Gaming in the '80s was definitely aimed at a certain personality type; it was much more of a niche thing. [Game] designers punished the user in particular ways that were common then, [especially in arcade] games, where the goal was to get as many quarters as possible out of a person's pocket. Now [a player has] already paid for the game and you don't need to ask for more money, so that changes most of the gameplay mechanics, like the one you mentioned before. Having to start over just isn't something that you would do in today's [game] designs. Some of the old puzzles were so hidden that it really took trial and error or asking your friend how to solve them, and we've tried to go through and create a design language to help you figure out all of the boxers' moves intuitively rather than having to look up [solutions] on the Internet.

You mean like when an opponent flashes a certain color, that means he's about to attack....

HOLLIDAY Yeah. There are [also] categorizations to each punch, and facial animations, vocalizations, and subtle camera movements also give you hints on what's coming.

These things definitely make the action more intuitive, but this is still very much a gamer's game—as you play further in, it's really challenging. I imagine that was a conscious decision, to give Punch-Out!! fans the kind of challenge they would expect from the series?

HOLLIDAY It's good to hear that the challenge was there for you, being a fan of the game and being a hardcore gamer.

Yeah—it was a good mix of getting to people, feeling like I'd never beat them, but then figuring it out. It's very satisfying.

HOLLIDAY The philosophy that we had during the entire course of development was to create a game that the fans would be really happy with—since we're fans as well—while adding Wii motion controls to create something that was a little more intuitive for everyone. The game has a simple play mechanic that almost invites the user to try it if they see it being played, so the first [series of fights] is kind of for the broader audience, [and later] you start to move into what I call the "punishment phase," where you're really going to have to hone your skills, practice, and use some of the other tools and features of the game to solve these puzzles.

When a player gets stumped, what would you say he should try first to get past the hurdle?

HOLLIDAY Um....

YORK Explore.

HOLLIDAY Yeah, explore. There's Practice mode, where Doc [has you fight] a hologram and you can't be hurt, where you can learn the patterns [for each opponent]. This training mode is about 90% accurate to what you'll see from the boxers. One [thing about this game] is that it's consistent. If you play the game in Japan and I play it in North America, we're experiencing the same fight, and your tips will help me in my game since the puzzle doesn't change. It's kind of like a Guitar Hero/Rock Band philosophy where you get to 61%, then the next time you get to 64%—we don't explicitly give the numbers, but we hope the users feel that, as they [keep trying], the next time they maybe see three more punches in the pattern, or knock their opponent down once. There's always hope and [the fight is] never going to change on you, so theoretically, everyone should be able to beat the game given enough time and practice. That was our goal from the beginning: we want everyone to experience the content.

YORK The fun thing about that is, maybe you get through a couple of boxers and then don't touch the game for a week, and when you come back to it, you're not practiced up or trained like a boxer would be, so you can't take on the next boxer—you've got to back up a fighter or two and sort of build into it, which I think is kind of interesting. Especially when you get to the later stages, you can't just pick up where you were; you've got to work your reflexes back up.

Definitely. It's also fun to go back and obliterate guys that used to give you trouble. The game seems to be much more cinematic than before, with various camera angles and KO animations. What was the inspiration for adding that to the series?

YORK That largely came from Tanabe-san and Miyamoto-san; they were really interested in playing up the 3-D aspect of the characters. Since we used a cel-shaded look, the initial prototype looked fairly flat; it looked 2-D. We had to spend a fair amount of time investigating the best way to show off the characters and the

> "We've tried to go through and create a design language to help you figure out all of the boxers' moves intuitively rather than having to look up [solutions] on the internet." —BRYCE HOLLIDAY

"We spent a big chunk of time early on refining what the characters mean to themselves before putting them into the experience." –BRYCE HOLLIDAY

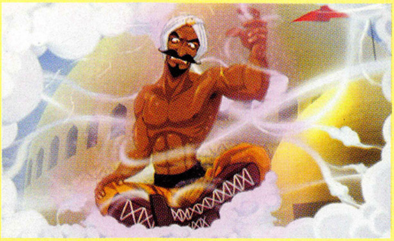
environments where it would play up the three-dimensionality of the game and not look like just a flat field.

TANABE The game world is 3-D, but the gameplay is 2-D. So, from the beginning, we had to figure out how to present the characters in the 3-D environment better. I often asked the team to use a different camera to get a better presentation of the action. For example, when a character is knocked down, we use another camera angle to show him differently. At the beginning of development, we experimented with rotating the camera left and right when punching, but that made the player feel dizzy after awhile, so we took that feature out.

YORK It is still mildly there when you dodge.

HOLLIDAY Subtle camera movement ended up working better. If we sometimes want to show a weakness, we might pull the camera in a little bit tighter. Or, when Little Mac is dodging, ducking, or throwing a Star Punch, we add some of the new things that a 3-D camera gives you, like [shaking], subtle rotation, and zooming.

YORK It started off quite coarse, [but now] it feels refined and polished.



Various techniques were used to bring the cast of Punch-Out!! to life as never before, such as the game's new story sequences.

Yeah. I have to give you guys a lot of credit because everything—especially the controls—feels very polished, and the timing is really dialed in whether you're using motion controls or the classic style. When you get hit, you know that it's totally your own fault and not because of the controls.

YORK Thanks.

HOLLIDAY Thank you!

What was the process like for updating the fighting styles of the classic characters? How did you decide what to tweak and what to leave alone?

HOLLIDAY When we first started developing the game, we took each character, separated them from the game, and talked through what they were feeling: why they wanted to fight Little Mac or why they were even in the WVBA circuit. We spent a few weeks developing a character and a persona [and discussing] what kinds of things he would do. So, we spent a big chunk of time early on refining what the characters mean to themselves before putting them into the experience, then figuring out how the progression goes between each character. It was invaluable to our artist to help solidify the vision of who the person was, and you see it in the montages or the little vignettes between rounds. We even thought about how Doc talks trash to a certain character.

YORK We relied a lot on the voice acting to give us insight into the culture and the body language; it informed the way the characters were presented. We got a lot of insight just from the people that spoke the native language; phrases they might use to pick a fight or make fun of somebody. That helped give it some authenticity, and it gave a subtle colloquial look and feel to the actions of the characters that we wouldn't have captured if we hadn't taken that approach to it.

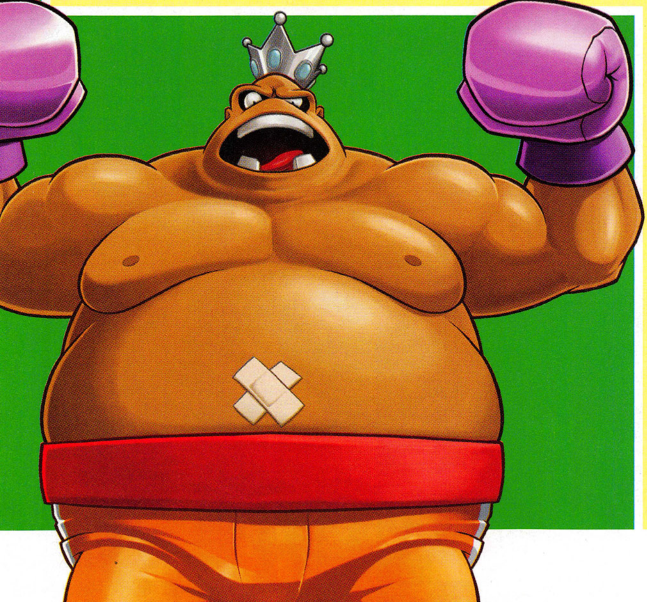
About those phrases—do you plan to subtitle those, or do you see a part of the charm being that players have to look up what they said?

YORK We're hoping it can create a sense of community. I think there's something fun about not knowing what some of these international characters might say or do, and we hope that people will go online and maybe create a sense of community around that. It makes them a little more ominous as bullies, too. We also tried to tie the phrases into the puzzles; sometimes there are hints there.

One last question for the Next Level folks: what did you learn about Punch-Out!! during development that you didn't know or fully understand as fans?

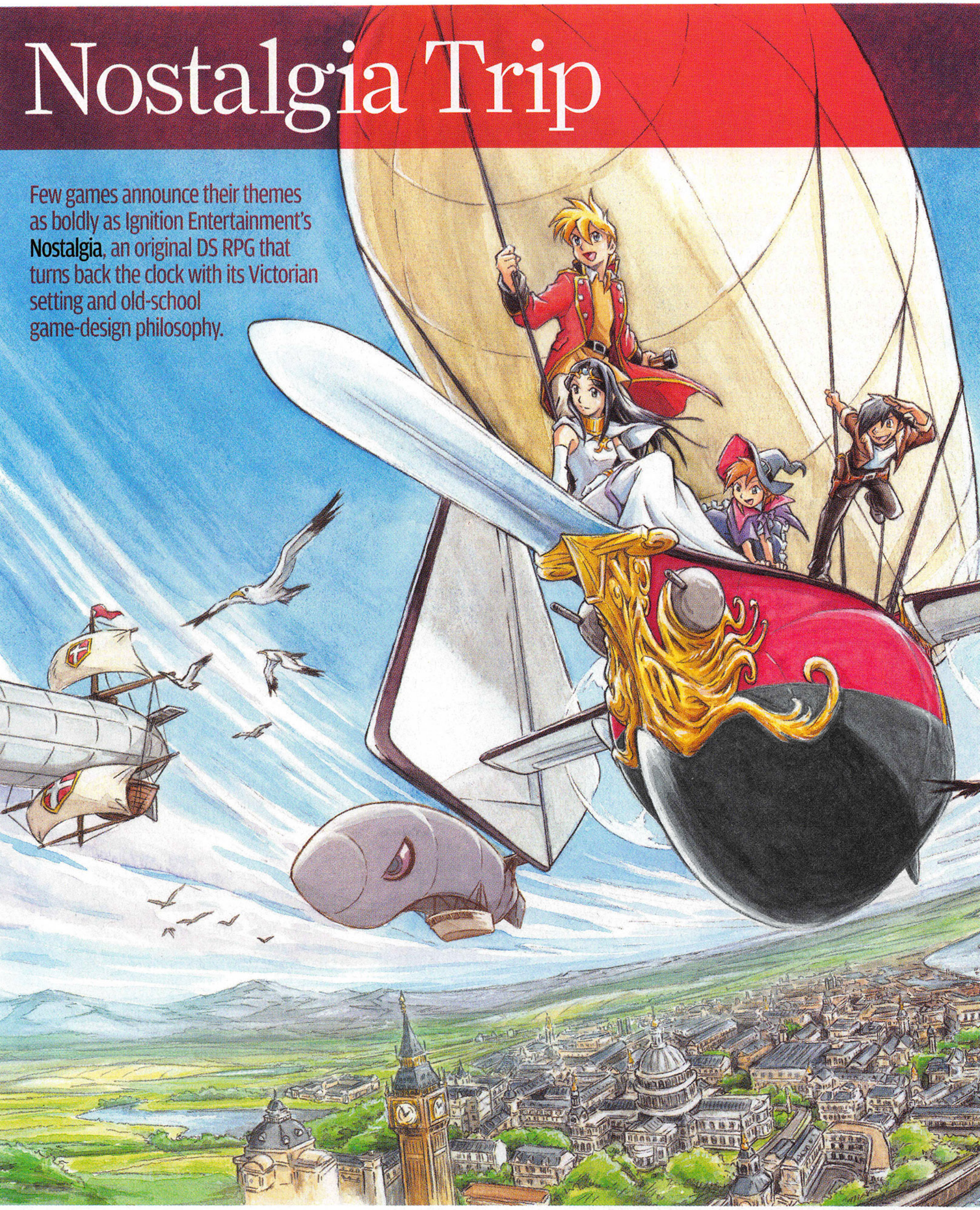
HOLLIDAY [long pause] That's a good question.... [Laughs]

YORK It's difficult to build a puzzle, or to test a puzzle, when you know the answer. [Laughs] It's difficult to tune for players, especially when you're dealing with casual users and you want to keep the core gamers happy. It's hard to understand how difficult a puzzle is when you know the answer. I'd say that was one of the biggest challenges. We were really lucky to have constant feedback from NCL and NOA to keep that in check. That was probably one of our biggest challenges, and I don't think you would know that as a fan until you're building the game.

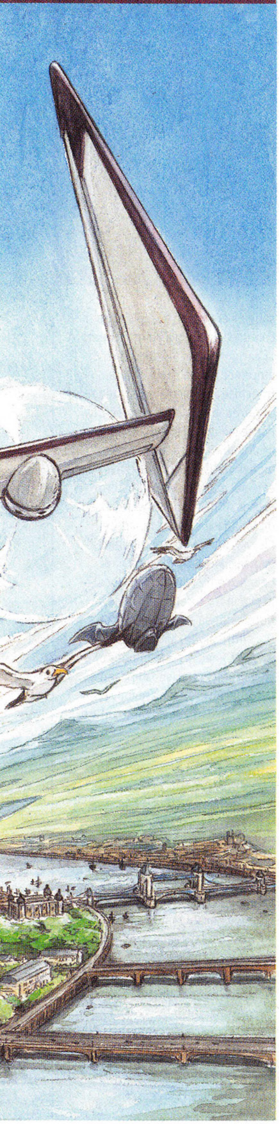


Nostalgia Trip

Few games announce their themes as boldly as Ignition Entertainment's **Nostalgia**, an original DS RPG that turns back the clock with its Victorian setting and old-school game-design philosophy.



BY CASEY LOE



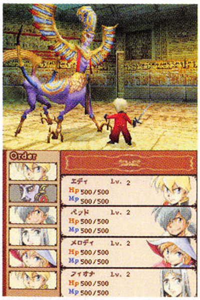
The game industry has been mining the past like never before. We have classic games on Virtual Console, scores of remakes on the Nintendo DS system, and even time-warped sequels like Mega Man 9 on WiiWare. But what if it isn't our childhood memories that makes these games so appealing, but rather some lost aspect of the way they were designed? "Recent games offer players an incredible amount of detail about their characters and their settings, which can be quite compelling," suggests Red Entertainment's Naoki Morita, the director of Nostalgia. "But I think it also distances players from their characters. Older games left a lot more room for players to bring their own imaginations to the adventure. When players completed those games, it left a much stronger impression, due to the sense that the adventure was their own." Morita found a kindred spirit in Tecmo producer Keisuke Kikuchi, who speaks wistfully of an era in which games stimulated as well as entertained. The two decided to make a game with a theme of "new nostalgia;" as Kikuchi puts it, "We wanted to make a game that would remind adults of the thrills of their own childhoods, and give children the sort of experience that they, too, would fondly remember a decade later."

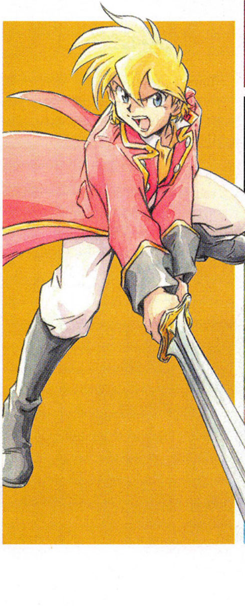
Morita had just the game in mind. Well over a decade ago, he and illustrator Yoshiteru Tsujino began designing a rollicking adventure game with an alternate-history 19th-century setting. The pair had big plans for the franchise, building a rich world that could support animated films and series on top of the game. But before the title could be brought into production, Red Entertainment's Sakura Wars emerged as a huge hit on the Sega Saturn, and Morita was forced to turn his full attention to making sequels and spin-offs for what would prove to be a wildly successful franchise. The design document for Nostalgia was sent to the vault, but Morita didn't mind. "I was confident that no matter how long it took, our designs for [Nostalgia] wouldn't lose their luster. There was no need to rush."

FLY? YES. LAND? NO.

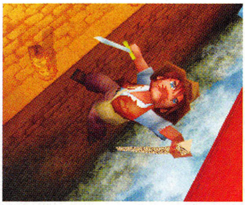
While it's conventional fantasy RPGs like Dragon Quest and Hydlide that elicit nostalgic memories from Kikuchi and Morita, the opening to Nostalgia feels more like something that would come from an *Indiana Jones* movie. A mysterious man and his hooded henchmen are holding a beautiful young girl named Fiona at gunpoint, demanding that she open a seal on an ancient artifact. But renowned adventurer Gilbert Brown swoops in to grab the girl, and leads her away to his airship amidst a hail of enemy bullets. After the ship crash-lands in the sea, Fiona is found safely aboard. Gilbert is not.

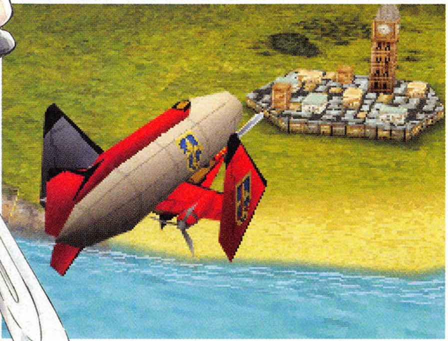
Players take the role of Gilbert's son Eddie, teaming up with Fiona (as well as a street



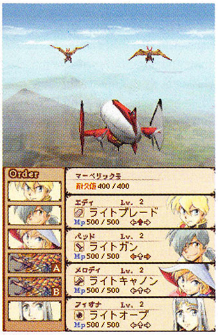


[Right] "Throw me the idol!"
"Throw me the rope!"
"Here you go, sucker!"





[Right] Giant, angry birds made air travel a perilous endeavor in the 19th century.



tough named Pad and the young sorceress Melody), to find out what became of his father. Nostalgia's alternate-history setting is an interesting one, offering a journey that begins in Victorian London and leads you through such memorable settings as the pyramids of Egypt and the wilds of the Amazon, as well as cities like Cairo, Cape Town, and New York. "The 19th century is the past, but it isn't so far away that it feels out of reach. I think that's part of what it makes it such an easy era to connect with," explains Morita. "And since science hadn't yet figured out all of what was and wasn't possible, there's still plenty of room for fantasy in there." Nostalgia happily scrambles the history we know with steampunk-zeppelin airships, magical spells and artifacts, and visits to such famous mythical locations as the lost continent of Lemuria and the Tower of Babel.

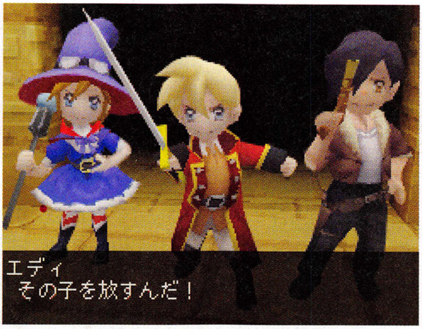
Nostalgia's alternate-history setting may stand out amongst the Tolkienesque fantasy-RPG franchises that are so popular in the West, but it's par for the course for Red Entertainment, a design studio that is famous for wildly offbeat RPG epics set in alternate-history Earths. Their breakout hit was the Tengai Makyou series, set in an alternate shogun-era Japan based on the confused and hyperbolic accounts of early Western visitors. The aforementioned Sakura Wars franchise revolved around steam-powered mechs piloted by opera-house singers in the 1920s. But as popular as these games were in their native land, none have ever seen a release on Western shores. "Those games were based on Japanese culture, Japanese history, and Japanese thoughts," explains Morita. "It would have been extremely difficult to localize them for foreign audiences. But Nostalgia's setting spans the entire globe, and the story was designed around themes of adventure, and friendship, and paternal love. These are universal themes that anyone of any culture can enjoy."

GETTING ALL MAVERICKY

Nostalgia's gameplay is based on similarly universal RPG themes, including a typical town-dungeon-town structure; turn-based battles with the options to attack, defend, and use skills or items; and side quests that involve finding lost pendants and wiping out sewer rats. This is the RPG equivalent of comfort food, and that's very much by design; Kikuchi worries that the more complex game systems of recent releases have been deterring newcomers to role-playing games, and he hopes that by sticking to the

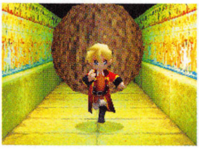
[Left] Melody's an able spell-caster on land, but in the air she's stuck on turret duty.

パッド
言ってるそばからお出ましだな。
やっつけてやろうぜ！



お化けネズミに出会った

[Below] Collapsing floors and rolling boulders are among the many traps that await intrepid adventurers.



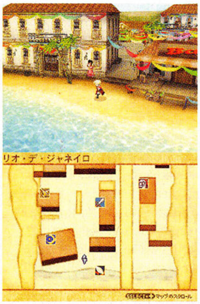
simple pleasures of the genre, he can win over both young players and some of the adults who gave up on gaming but picked up a DS during the brain-training boom.

Nostalgia is indeed a game that anyone can play without ever cracking the manual, but that doesn't mean the strategic elements that appeal to serious RPG fans aren't there—they're just buried a little bit deeper. "We designed the battle and character-development systems to offer many different solutions, so that each of our players can take advantage of their own wit and skills," explains Kikuchi. For example, new users can play without ever considering the move-order table on the lower screen, which shows when each character gets to act, and how much recovery time each skill requires. But this information will allow cannier players to select quicker moves that will allow them to get a second attack in before their foe's turn rolls around, or to figure out when they can use a buff spell without being set back a turn. The game's skill trees also pack plenty of depth; characters learn new moves automatically by leveling up, but they can spend Skill Points to enhance their effects and lower their costs, and doing so will allow them to learn the next branch of that skill tree more quickly than they otherwise would. You have a single pool of Skill Points for all your characters, so you're free to reduce Eddie's role to just healing, for example, freeing up extra Skill Points to expand Melody's repertoire of spells.

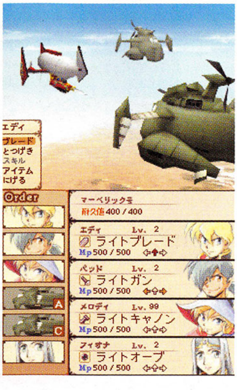
One can't be expected to hoof it from downtown London to Rio de Janeiro, so it's lucky that Eddie promptly inherits the Maverick airship from his father. While the Maverick puts the world within reach, you'll find that the skies are full of perils. Nostalgia has a second battle system for when the Maverick runs into enemy airships or giant birds; each member of the crew takes a battle station and is given a whole new set of airship-themed attacks and skills. Kikuchi considers the airship to be the cornerstone of the game, and the aspect that attracted him most to the project. "It allows players to visit any of the world's cultures in an enjoyable way, while serving as a good game mechanic and a perfect fit for the game's setting." Indeed, a producer aiming for a nostalgic experience certainly couldn't go wrong with an airship, as any fan of Final Fantasy or Skies of Arcadia can attest.

THE NOSTALGIA FORMULA?

Nostalgia is—as its creators hoped—simple to play, fast-paced, charming, and fun. But is that really all it takes to capture the imagination of young players, and remind lapsed gamers what they used to love about the medium? Morita seems confident that he's found the recipe. "When I was a kid, I used to love watching TV shows about boys going on all sorts of adventures. A lot of those shows were based on stories that were a century old," he muses. "[With Nostalgia], I wanted to create a story that could survive for a century, exciting children of any generation, and evoking wistful memories in adults." We'll see if Nostalgia can live up to such lofty expectations in September of 2109, a century after its US release.

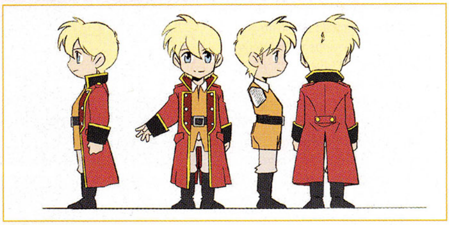

リオ・デ・ジャネイロ
マップのスクロール

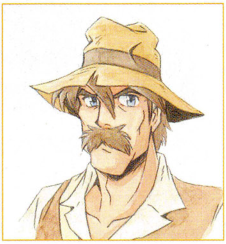
[Above] The lower screen sports a detailed auto-map when outside of combat.

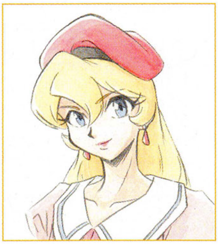


Mr. Eddie's Fathers

Animator Yoshiteru Tsujino worked on the famous *Lupin III* series before working (under the name of Torajiro Tsujino) as the concept artist and character designer for Japan's seminal Tengai Makyou series. His distinctive pencil-and-water-color style defined the series and retains its powerful, dreamlike quality today. Tsujino was kind enough to join director Naoki Morita in guiding us through Nostalgia's birth and 10-year evolution.







NINTENDO POWER Is Nostalgia the first game you've worked on outside of the Tengai Makyou series? What sorts of projects have you been working on in the intervening years?

YOSHITERU TSUJINO I've been doing planning for animation projects and drawing manga for a long time. As for games, I have been involved in several projects outside of the Tengai Makyou series, but Nostalgia is the only title that was ever actually produced.

What led you to become involved with Nostalgia?

TSUJINO I was charmed by Mr. Morita's story of young boys and girls setting off on an adventure. The game's themes of chance encounters, friendship, adventure, and love are among my favorites to work with. The illustrations sprung forth with ease, and that allowed Mr. Morita and me to expand the world of Nostalgia.

Upon returning to the Nostalgia project a decade after shelving it, what changes were you able to add that wouldn't have been possible 10 years ago?

NAOKI MORITA When we were writing the original plan for Nostalgia 10 years ago, we had only three main characters: Eddie, Pad, and Melody. By adding Fiona we were able to provide a central focus for the game's mysteries and bring out more of Melody's charm. We also never expected that we would be able to realize the game's world map in 3-D, and have an airship that's able to fly at different elevations.... Finally, I never would have been able to express the theme of parents and children in the scenario 10 years ago. But in the intervening years I grew old and became a parent myself.

TSUJINO We were also able to add the ability to customize the hero's airship, the Maverick, by adding additional weapons like the cannon, giant sword, and so on.

How does your artistic process differ when drawing for 3-D games? Are you involved in the character-modeling process?

TSUJINO What makes it different from manga and animation is that three-dimensional characters require three-dimensional designs. As for the character modeling, we checked the main characters at an early stage to set a standard quality level and approve how the original drawings are being converted into models. Matrix Software was responsible for modeling, and they did a wonderful job in transforming my drawings to reality.

Do you have a vault full of other unused ideas that you hope to revive one day?

MORITA This world is huge, and there are many places I hope to travel to. I would love to delve further into the lives of Eddie, and the characters he met on his journey. And perhaps after that, write some stories of his father's adventures in his own youth. If you're asking about game mechanics, I think there's a lot of potential for evolution in the airship battles that I'd like to explore one day. Of course, whether or not any of this will be possible depends on the reactions from the players.

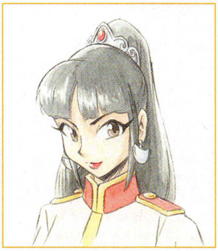
TSUJINO We had lots of ideas for characters that we weren't able to use. We weren't able to find a place for them in this game, but if the chance presents itself, I hope we'll be able to use them in the future.

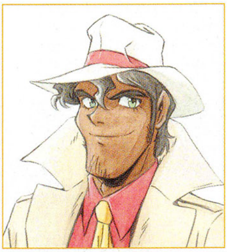
What is it about alternate-history worlds that appeals to you as a writer?

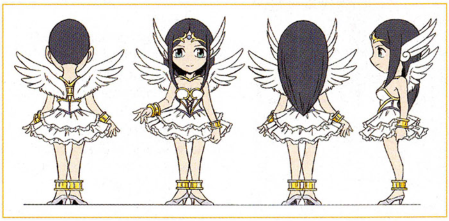
MORITA It can certainly be a lot of fun to create a new world from whole cloth, but I really find it exciting to revisit a chapter of history and mix in a few fantastical "lies" to create a world of what-ifs. The future is ultimately just a fantasy that we can only imagine, and no two people will visualize the same thing. But we can all see the same things when we visualize the past. So using the past as a foundation makes for more accessible fantasy worlds.

What inspires the dreamlike quality of your artwork?

TSUJINO Life itself and everything I see. You can always find something new and inspiring anywhere, if you pay careful attention to what's going on around you. I never know what little experience in my daily life will turn out to be a source of creative ideas.







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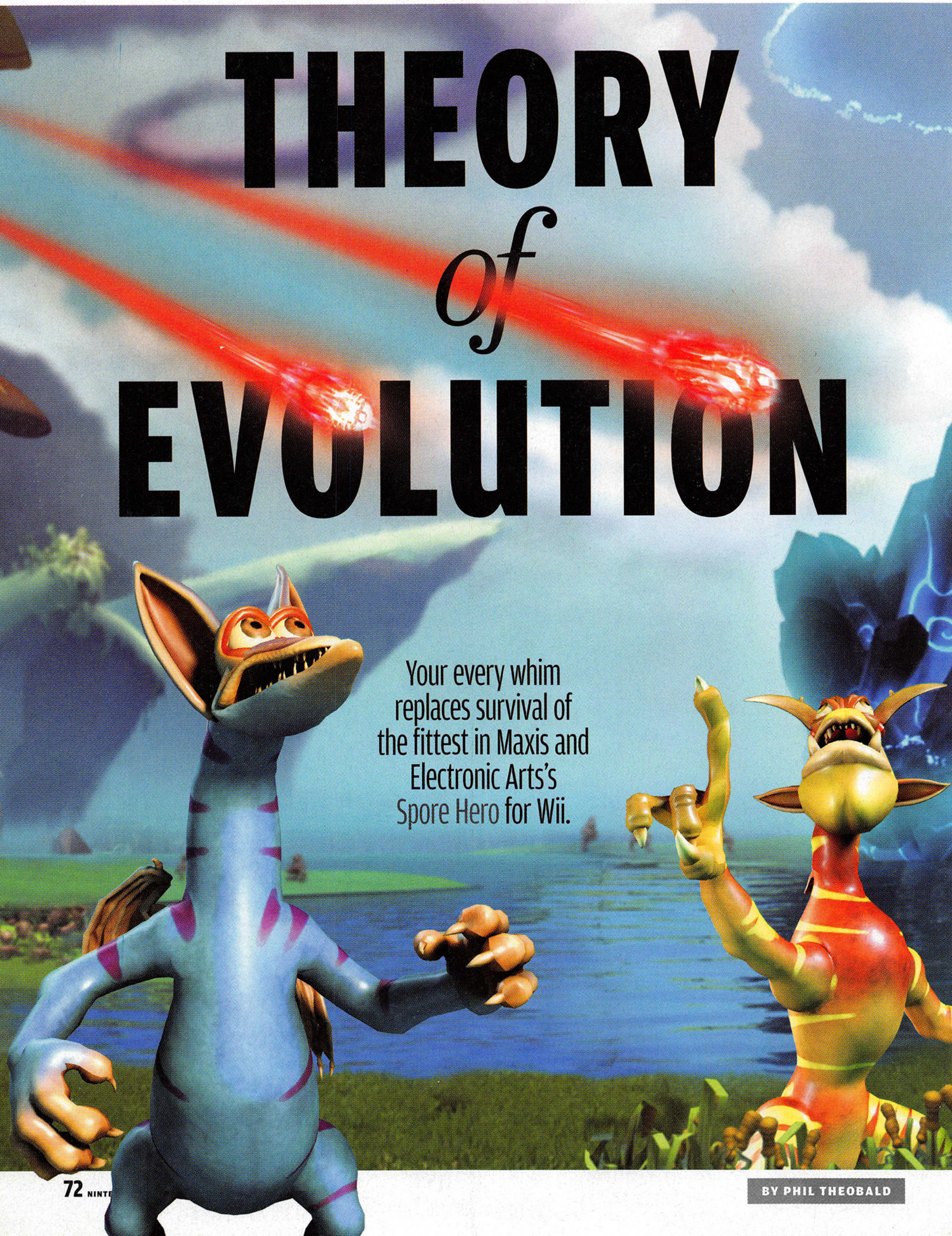
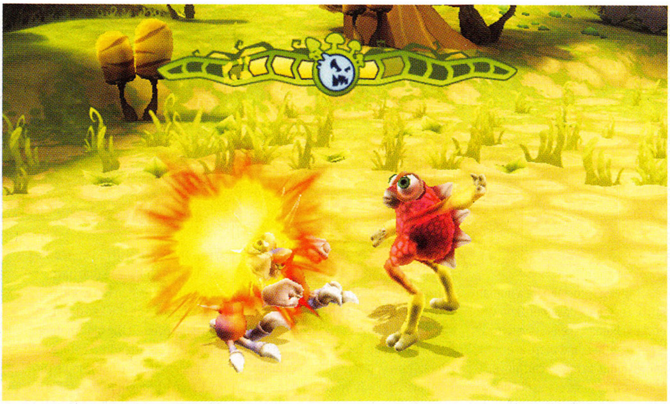
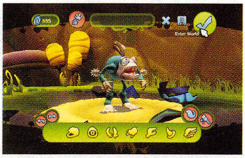
THEORY *of* EVOLUTION



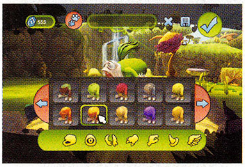
Your every whim replaces survival of the fittest in Maxis and Electronic Arts's Spore Hero for Wii.

BY PHIL THEOBALD

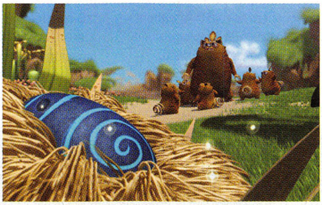




[Below] A new body used to require months of working out. Here, you simply point and click.



MAXIS, THE GAME DEVELOPMENT company founded by Will Wright and Jeff Braun, is known for its long history of wildly addictive simulation titles. The company's first release, SimCity, had you playing as a mayor of a burgeoning metropolis. It was so well received that it spawned a franchise that's been going strong for 20 years now. More recently, The Sims series has allowed you to control the lives of virtual suburbanites. Maxis's latest hit is the PC game Spore. It's an evolution simulator of sorts, allowing you to create your own unicellular organism and manipulate it as it gains sentience, develops its own civilization, and eventually colonizes other planets. Given the popularity of Maxis games on the PC, it is little surprise that they are often ported to consoles. Over the years, there have been plenty of SimCity and The Sims titles released on Nintendo platforms. This fall the Wii system gets its own version of Spore, dubbed Spore Hero.



In contrast to the PC version of Spore, which is broken up into five different phases representing evolutionary periods in your creature's existence, Spore Hero is designed to be a bit more personal. Instead of commanding the fate of an entire species, you now control one specific creature that you lead through its evolving life as it becomes the hero (hence the title) of its own adventure. Think of Spore Hero as the evolutionary mechanics of the PC Spore wrapped around a 3-D platformer.

IT'S ALIVE

It's usually best to *end* with a bang, but the fireworks start early in Spore Hero. The game begins with a massive planetary explosion that sends glowing meteor fragments hurtling down toward the planet that you will soon call home. Jagged blue rock chunks embed themselves in the ground, and out of one falls a small egg that becomes your creature.

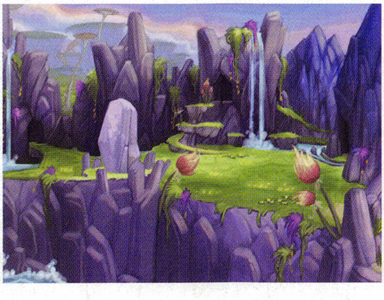
It's surprising when you take control only to find yourself engulfed in darkness. That's when you realize you are still inside your egg. A few whacks with the Wii Remote controller are all that's required to burst through the shell, allowing light to stream in and giving you a glimpse of the alien life forms that are fascinated by the little egg that has appeared before them.

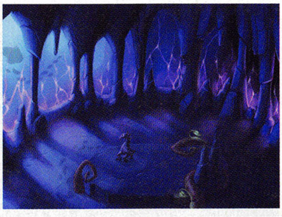
Once you're free, you find yourself in a very inviting world. The level design is whimsical and playful, making for a land that you want to explore. The textures on the landscape are all hand-painted, resulting in a bright and colorful look. The music, which would not be out of place in a Disney film, helps to complete the feel.

FROM MY HEART AND FROM MY HAND

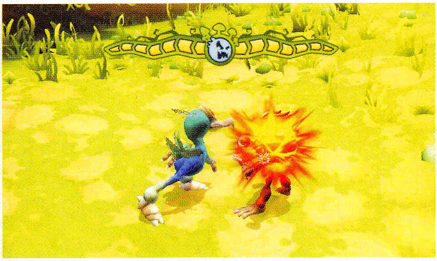
Before you lead your new friend on his grand adventure, you first have to design him (or is it a her?). This is where Spore Hero's creature creator comes into play. Hopping into your nest brings up the creator, where you have full control over how your hero looks. (The nest also serves as a handy continue point.) Instead of attempting to cram the PC creature creator—with its multiple tiny buttons and mouse/keyboard controls—onto Wii, the interface has been redesigned with the Wii Remote in mind. There is less screen clutter, and the necessary buttons have been enlarged for easy point-and-click control. Don't let the simplified interface fool you into thinking the creator is less than robust, though. Just about any animal you can imagine can be created here.

Do you want to make a six-





Whether you're traipsing through a fertile valley or exploring a darkened cave, the landscape is always fanciful.



[Left] Large, sharp beaks come in handy when it's time to dish out some punishment.

legged monstrosity with horns on its face, three mouths on its back, and eyeballs on its knees? You can whip it up in minutes. Parts can be placed just about anywhere on your character, and they can be rotated and scaled until your creation looks just right. Of course, when presented with near-infinite possibilities for creating a hero, there's that small problem of animating the beast. After all, the lead character of Spore Hero isn't your typical video game star. How does the game make a character move when it has no idea what the final creation will look like?

That's where Maxis' "procedural animation" comes into play. It's relatively easy to animate a human in 3D. The game designers know how the human skeletal system is put together, and there are known limits to how it can move. This allows animators to define movement patterns ahead of time. In Spore Hero, though, the computer analyzes your creation's morphology in real time as you alter your design and defines the character movement based on your decisions. This way you can toss as many limbs of varying sizes on your hero as you'd like without worrying about it flopping around like a freak once it is finished.

When choosing parts to add to your creature, don't select them just for their aesthetic value. Most of the pieces affect your character's statistics, allowing you to create something that not only looks how you would like, but also behaves the way you want it to.

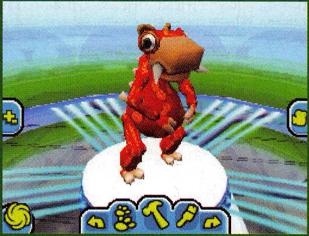
FRIEND OR FOE

Your creation's unique attributes don't have much effect on the game's most basic mechanics. As you lead your new creature around the world, one of your first tasks is to collect fragments from other fallen meteorites. Smashing this space debris earns you glowing blue stones that are used as currency when adding new parts to your hero (hey, evolution ain't free). There are also red meteorites dotting the landscape that have a negative effect on the world. These need to be tracked down and destroyed—if the blue meteors spawned your friendly creature, what might those troublesome red rocks have brought to the planet? Keep an eye out for piles of bones, as well. Rooting through those is a good way to find new parts that can be added to your creature.

Once you start getting into the deeper aspects of gameplay, your creature's attributes become more useful. Certain areas of the world are accessible only if your creature has a special ability. Evolving your creature with powerful legs that grant double jumps, or wings to fly, is the only way to

SPORTABLE

Launching alongside Spore Hero for Wii is the similarly titled but quite different Nintendo DS handheld game Spore Hero Arena. Functioning as a side story of sorts to the Wii game, this adventure begins with the same explosion that opens Spore Hero. This time, however, the story focuses on a creature whose spaceship is struck by one of the meteoroid chunks as the rock flies through space. Our hero's ship crash-lands on a planet where the inhabitants frequently duke it out in arena battles. The dark energy released by fallen red meteorites has corrupted the fighting champions, making them eager to take out you, their latest challenger.

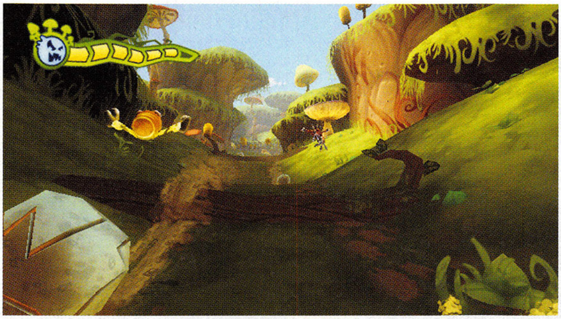


[Above] He may have a face that only a mother could love, but this little guy is obviously armed to the teeth.

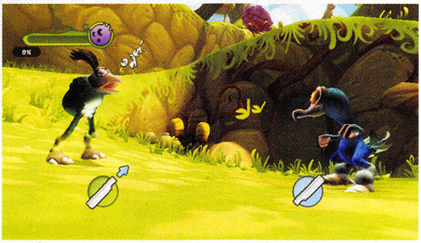
Spore Hero Arena is combat-centric, but it focuses heavily on upgrading your character's abilities. As in Spore Hero, collecting new parts that can be added to your hero within the creature creator is the key to improving your stats. Unlike in the currently available DS game, Spore Creatures, which features 2-D monsters in a 3-D world, this title is in full 3-D. The 3-D creature creator is a snap to navigate thanks to the DS's stylus controls.

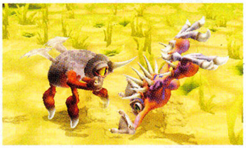
Once you enter battle, though, the controls rely mostly on button inputs. The touch screen is reserved for pulling off special moves such as shocking opponents by drawing a line where you want your electric blast to travel. The action takes place on the bottom screen while the top screen shows a bird's-eye view of the arena. As you move through the fighting ranks, you face challenges such as survival matches and time attacks. Eventually you'll travel to different planets on your quest to collect the best parts to build the ultimate warrior.

Considering the emphasis on combat, you'll be happy to hear that the game supports multiplayer matches over Wi-Fi. When taking on a friend, you'll be able to compete in multiple modes, such as Battle Royale, Team Battle, Survival, and Capture the Egg (which is sort of like the ever-popular Capture the Flag, but with more cholesterol).



[Left] Quick reflexes are required to get your hero past the many hazards that it faces during a race.





get past certain obstacles. Body parts even determine how you interact with the other animals that inhabit the world.

Whenever you encounter another life form, you have two options: you can opt to socialize with it—turning it into an ally—or you can be combative. Choosing the social route triggers minigames that have you singing or busting out some stylish poses to impress your would-be buddies. These games are heavily reliant on motion controls. As you sing, for example, your critter's pitch is dictated by pointing the Wii Remote up and down. Match another animal's song, and you've made a friend for life (or until you decide you'd rather fight).

Combat is, as you might imagine, focused less on the clever controls and more on the smashy-smashy. Still, a few quick remote flicks are all you need to take down a vulnerable opponent. Maxis is going all out to make sure that despite the game's simulation roots, its combat is deep enough to stack up to that of other platformers.

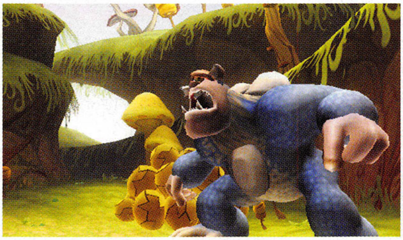
GET TO WORK

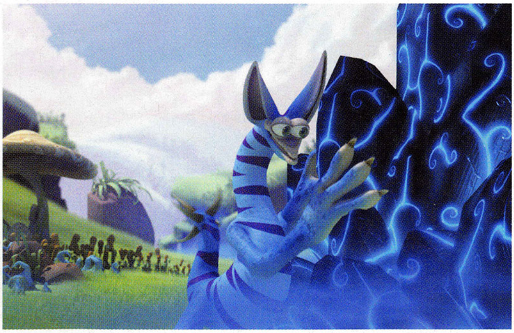
It's not all creating and interacting in Spore Hero land. Maxis wants to mesh the open-world gameplay of the original Spore with more structure. That means missions, and plenty of 'em. As you explore the world, there are all sorts of tasks to complete. Doing so earns you new parts to upgrade your creature. Interestingly, a dynamic-parts-distribution system grants you new parts based on how you're playing the game. If you go around picking fights, you're more likely to gain new combat parts. Peaceniks will probably collect more pieces that allow them to more effectively turn on the charm.

There are all sorts of missions that test different gaming skills. Roughly 50 missions are directly tied to the story, but a plethora of additional ones function as side quests. Some of the missions are arcade-oriented, such as a race to the top of a hill—you shake the Wii Remote and Nunchuk controllers to run, and there are pits to jump and rolling boulders to dodge (the latter being tossed at you by an angry-looking monster at the top of the hill). Other missions require a bit more creativity. Early in the game, a mopey beast named, well, Beast is feeling blue because the love of his live, Beauty (natch), doesn't find him attractive. It's up to you to chat with Beauty to find out what she likes in a fella, and then give Beast a makeover. Take the poor sap into the creature creator and remove all his ugly bits and spruce him up with what the lady wants to see. If you improve his looks enough, the couple lives happily ever after. Beast will even keep his new look throughout the entire game. Each mission nets you special items if you clear it with a perfect score—perfect for hardcore completionists.

The PC version of Spore was enjoyable, but it was so easy to get caught up in creating new critters that the simulation aspect felt secondary (still, we're excited to see what kinds of crazy creatures our readers come up with). With a giant world to explore and missions to complete, Spore Hero should prove engaging on multiple levels.

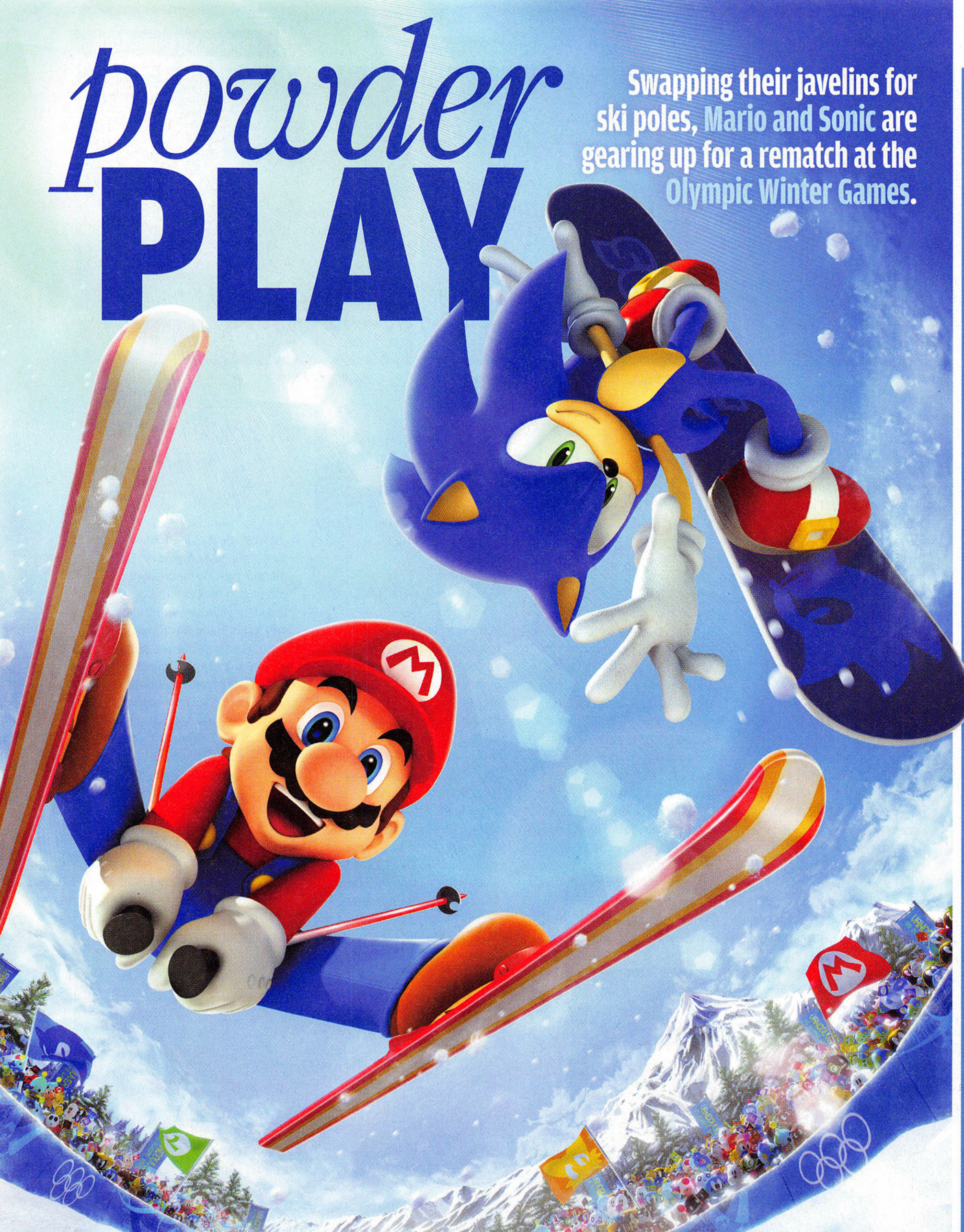
These creatures may look a bit odd, but we're sure you'll come up with something weirder.





powder PLAY

Swapping their javelins for ski poles, Mario and Sonic are gearing up for a rematch at the Olympic Winter Games.



BY CASEY LOE

I don't know why that Phelps guy got so much press: the breakout stars of the Beijing Summer Olympics were clearly Mario and Sonic. Their game had unlikely triumphs (a portly plumber medaling in several different events), shocking scandals (a prominent Olympian later tested positive for Werehogism), and worldwide sales that shattered records left and right.

[Above] Years of stomping Dry Bones have taught Luigi a thing or two about jumping on skeletons.

About the only achievement that eluded Mario & Sonic was critical acclaim, with most reviewers awarding only bronze medals due to complaints about the game's shallow structure, occasionally confusing controls, and failure to capture the characters' personalities. With 10 million copies sold, the franchise has proven itself to be critic-proof, but the complaints have not fallen on deaf ears at Sega. "We always look at the critical side and review scores, and that gives us great insight on what to tweak," explains Sean Ratcliffe, Sega's vice president of marketing. "Just because the audience for this game is primarily families and kids, it doesn't mean we can take our foot off the gas and not develop a great game." And while Mario & Sonic producer Osamu Ohashi is proud that his team was able to complete the game in time for a holiday release, he laments the 12-month development schedule that didn't give them time to fully capture the spirit of the event or the charm of its cast. This time, with a longer schedule, a larger team, and plenty of experience under his belt, he's going for the gold.

Work on Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games for the Nintendo DS and Wii systems began immediately upon the completion of the previous title, giving Ohashi's group nearly twice as much time to work. And instead of having the same people complete both the console and handheld versions of the game, Ohashi was given enough staff—over 100 people in all—to create two separate teams. "Like many multiplatform games, the Wii and DS versions [of Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games] were quite similar in their content. We wanted to make sure that this time, the Wii and the Nintendo DS versions offer a completely different experience," explains Ohashi. "[The Wii and DS] have different audiences and each experience will cater to that audience." And it doesn't hurt that with two different games, fans will have much more of an incentive to double-dip.

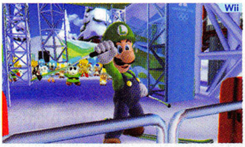
A SLEIGH RIDE TOGETHER WITH YOU

There are plenty of new features in the Wii version of the game, but it's the co-op play that excites director Takashi Iizuka the most. "When most people think about party games, competitive multiplayer immediately comes to mind. But we've made cooperative multiplayer a priority. We think it's a great thing to have a whole family or group of friends work together for a single medal." Iizuka promises that his team has built cooperative elements into several events, but the only one he was ready to reveal was the bobsleigh, in which up to four players sit with a Wii Remote controller held vertically to their chests, and the game steers the bobsleigh by averaging together the angles at which everyone is leaning.

As the quirky bobsleigh controls demonstrate, the Wii version of Mario & Sonic has moved beyond testing players' manual dexterity and will now be a full-body affair. The downhill-skiing event puts the

Wii
vancouver 2010

[Above] Sparse attendances suggests that Shy Guys aren't big fans of speed skating.



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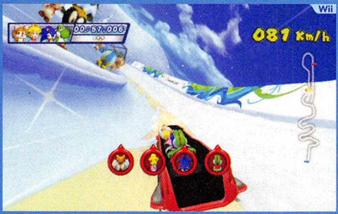
LET *the* GAMES BEGIN!

Only five events from Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Winter Games have been revealed, but Sega will be announcing plenty more in the months to come. Here's what we've seen so far:

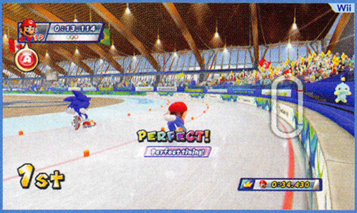


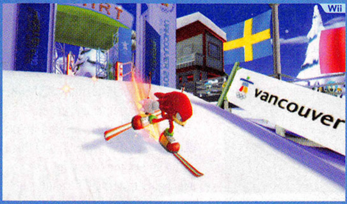
BOBSLEIGH (Wii)

Up to four players can collaborate in this, the first revealed co-op event. Each player shakes his remote for an initial burst of speed as the character pushes the sleigh, then the player presses the A Button to make the character hop aboard. With the Wii Remote raised to their chests, players lean from side to side to guide the sled down the track's marked route. When all players lean in perfect unison, you'll get an extra burst of speed.

SPEED SKATING (Wii)

This Wii Remote-focused event closely mimics the actual arm movements of speed skaters. Pump left to right for an initial burst of speed, then swing your arms rhythmically like a pendulum at your side. Each character has a special dash he can use once with a tap of the A Button—save it for a straightaway.



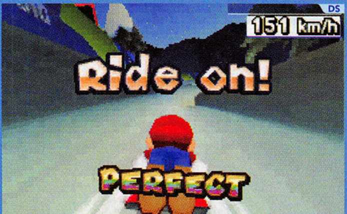


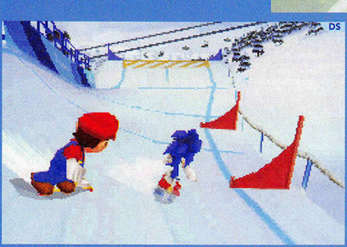
DOWNHILL SKIING (Wii)

Push off by lowering your Wii Remote/Nunchuk ski poles, then steer down the hill by either shifting your weight on the Balance Board or tilting your Wii Remote. Set a course to pass just inside the flags for a speed boost, or stick to the middle and use your A-Button dash to pull ahead of the pack.

SKELETON (DS)

This luge variant is played solely with the stylus. Scratch left to right to build up your initial speed boost, and scratch upward at designated points for a further boost. You can steer merely by tapping to the left or right of your character.





SNOWBOARD CROSS (DS)

The snowboard cross uses the Control Pad to maneuver, Y to accelerate, and B to catch air as you launch over the tip of a ramp. Experienced players can attempt to drift by tapping the L and R Buttons in advance of their turns.

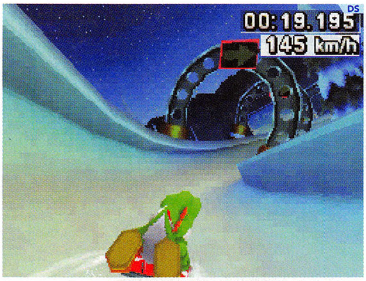
Wii Balance Board to good use, allowing you to steer with your legs and treat your Wii Remote and Nunchuk controllers as ski poles. (Of course, every event has a remote-only control scheme for players who don't have a Nunchuk or Balance Board.)

Another feature that seems to be exclusive to the Wii version is the addition of character-specific special actions that can be used once per event, allowing Mario to let loose with the spin attack from Super Mario Galaxy or Tails to engage in a quick burst of tail-propeller flight, for instance. In the two events we were shown, both of those actions resulted in a functionally identical speed boost, but it was nice to see the cast show a bit of personality. We also expect to see the characters' charm on full display in Festival mode, a Wii-exclusive story mode that begins with the Winter Olympics opening ceremony and follows the games' full 17-day schedule. Iizuka isn't giving up many details about this mode yet, but did confirm that you can play the mode either solo or with a co-op team, and hinted at boss battles with familiar characters from the Mario and Sonic universes.

LUGING AND LOOTING

"While both games are based off the Olympics, we wanted to make the DS game a completely different experience from the Wii [title]," explains Eigo Kasahara, who is directing the version for the

[Above] The ideal bobsled path is always clearly marked, but getting your family to lean in it unison may not be so easy...



[Above] The luge track is a meticulous recreation of the one being used in the actual Vancouver Winter Olympics. As if you'd know the difference!

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Nintendo DS. His team has already succeeded in making the game a significantly different experience from its Summer Olympics predecessor on the Nintendo DS. Gone are the confusing control schemes that mixed the touch screen and Control Pad inputs; now events will use either the handheld's touch screen or face buttons exclusively—never both. The DS version also has a new focus on the single-player experience, offering a complete one-player Olympics-themed RPG known as Adventure Tours. But there are still plenty of treats in there for players who want to challenge their friends. First and foremost, every event in the game will support single-card play, allowing up to four players to compete using a single game card.

Wii
VANCOUVER 2010

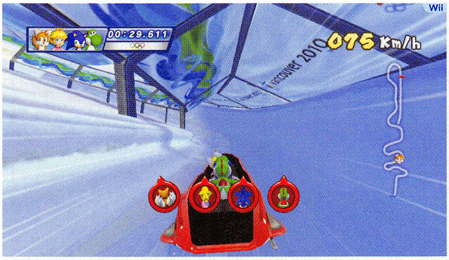
Now, what's this we've heard about an RPG mode? "You'll control Mario & Sonic, explore a huge map, go on quests, and solve various minigames," explains Kasahara. "We think we'll be able to show you really new things about Mario & Sonic's worlds, and the mixture of both of their worlds, that have never been shown before."

DIFFERENT ROADS, COMMON GOALS

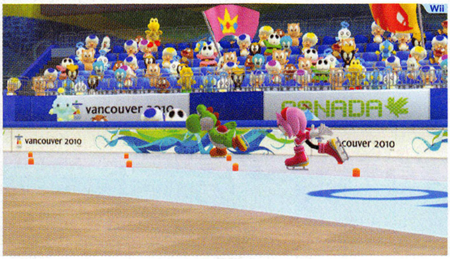
The two game versions may be targeting different audiences, but there are a few goals that both development teams share. Making the games more appealing to hardcore gamers was a top priority, and one that the team has addressed by adding a more challenging level of gameplay to each event. These are advanced mechanics that skilled gamers can take advantage of, but that younger and more-casual players can safely ignore. For example, players who hit just inside of the flag markers in the Wii version of downhill skiing will get a temporary speed boost, but if they're slightly wide of the mark, they'll hit the wrong side of the marker and be slapped with a time penalty for straying off course. Players will need to study the course carefully and anticipate which flags can provide a safe speed boost in order to get an edge over players who steer down the middle.

We've also been promised a return of the original game's fantastical "dream events," which shattered the Olympic rules to add Mario Kart-esque twists like usable items and special moves. When pressed for details, Ohashi would only tell us that there will be a wider selection of dream events than the four found in the Summer Olympics game. These events will remain unlockable bonuses, while all of the normal events will now be unlocked from the start.

We've only scratched the surface of what Mario & Sonic's latest outing has to offer, and Ohashi's team has many more secrets to reveal. But even at this early stage, it's gratifying to see how much his team has learned from their past stumbles. The wild success of Mario & Sonic at the Olympic Games gave them 10 million reasons to ignore the judges and skate the same routine, but they're aiming for the triple salchow nonetheless.



[Above] Straighten up, Tails! STRAIGHTEN UP! You're ruining it for everyone!



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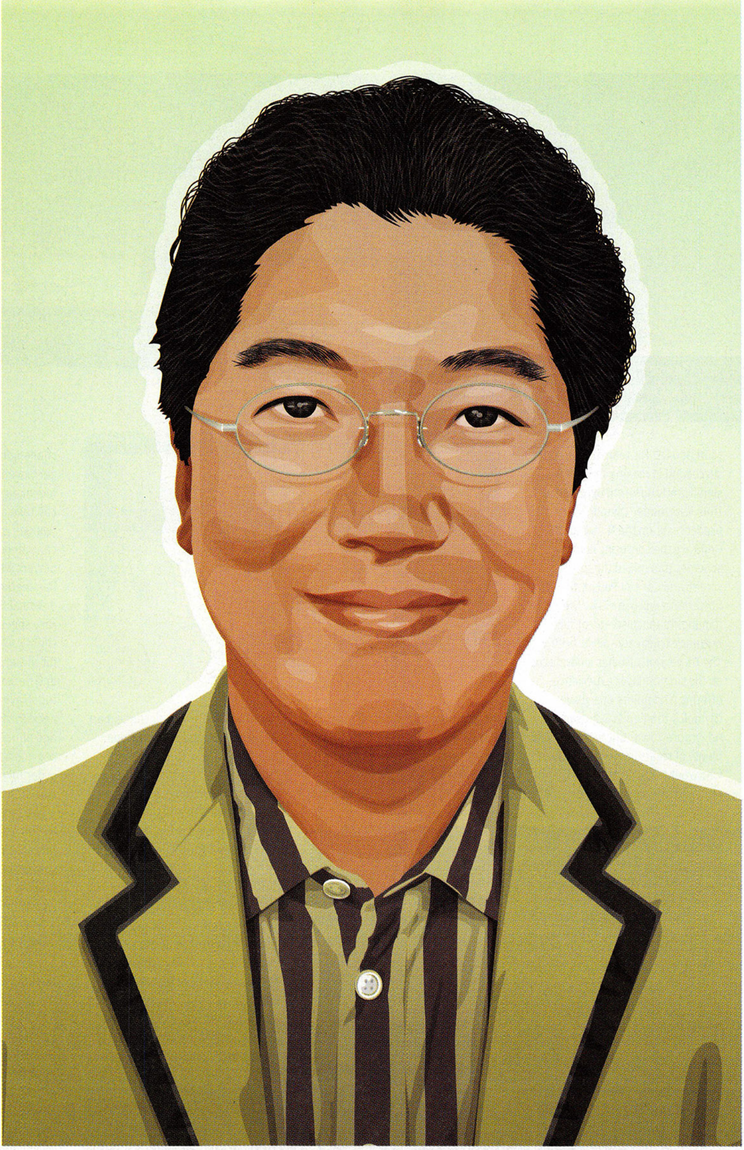
Power Profiles



DATE OF BIRTH
September 17, 1965

BIRTHPLACE
Osaka, Japan

POSITION
President and CEO of Prope

BEST KNOWN FOR
Co-creating Sonic the Hedgehog, doing what Nintendon't

FAVORITE FOOD
Motsunabe, Korean BBQ, sushi, pizza, hamburgers

CURRENT PROJECTS
Let's Tap, unrevealed projects

Yuji Naka

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINA EMPEDOCLES

You could probably count on one hand the number of developers who have impacted the video game medium as significantly or for as long as Yuji Naka. After joining Sega at just 18 years of age, Naka spent his early days as a programming ninja, single-handedly coding dozens of high-profile titles for the Sega Master System and Sega Genesis. In 1991, he teamed with a small group of talented designers to create one of gaming's greatest icons: Sonic the Hedgehog. He was subsequently put in charge of Sonic Team, and for more than a decade, consistently produced some of the riskiest, most innovative games on the market. Over the years, however, Naka was given more and more management responsibilities, leaving him less and less time for creative endeavors. Anxious to start making games again, Naka left Sonic Team in 2006 and started his own independent studio named Prope. The upstart's first project—Let's Tap—hits this June.

NINTENDO POWER **How did you first become involved in the video game industry?**

YUJI NAKA I started at Sega. When I was a high school student, I worked for the company part time. I was porting games from one platform to another. Going back further, the reason I first got interested in computers was because my favorite musician was using them to make music. From there, I started coding games.

I really enjoyed porting games to new systems because I learned a lot that way. For a programmer, it was really challenging to port a game from a high-quality arcade machine to a lower-quality home console. I worked on [the Genesis version] of Ghouls 'n Ghosts, for instance, and I feel that prepared me to make Sonic the Hedgehog. The skills I developed working on ports are what enabled me to create new games. Probably the most difficult port I ever did, by the way, was the Master System version of Space Harrier. I remember that one being really tough. [Laughs]

Back then I was working on about three games per year. Now, it takes a lot more time than that to make just one game. [Laughs] In the 8-bit era, a developer could create a game in three months. I wish it were still like that. It allowed us to tackle a lot of different challenges. But now it takes about a year and a half. That equates to a much greater investment from the publisher, so you can't try as many different things. They'd rather play it safe with lots of sequels. Even when new hardware is introduced, you still see the same games. That's kind of boring to me. These days, before I even open the package, I already know what to expect from a game. That's why I wanted to make something like Let's Tap. When I was a child, I was always so excited to get a new game because I never knew I would find. I wanted to give that kind of feeling to players today.

When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

Hmmm...I don't really remember! [Laughs] Probably an astronaut. I really wanted to go into space. I wish I had known back then that if I entered NASA, I could realize that dream. My parents should have told me! Had I known, I might have studied harder. [Laughs]

You addressed this a little bit already regarding the longer development cycles, but how would you say the video game industry has changed during the time you've been involved with it?

Previously, games didn't need to be realistic. Now a big part of a game's marketing is how realistic it is. Think of it like the difference between a novel and a movie. Games used to be like novels in that there was a lot of room for the player's imagination. With current games, everything is laid out for the player.

The biggest change for me, personally, over the past 25 years is that I'm no longer involved in hardware development. I used to work on the hardware side, and in those days, I was battling Nintendo! [Laughs] That's no longer the case, obviously. But for me, I think those hardware battles were more fun. [Laughs]

Why did you originally choose to work at Sega rather than some other publisher?

I wanted to go to Namco. [Laughs] But I didn't get very good grades in high school. That's why I didn't go to university. Back then, Sega and Taito were the only companies that would hire people without a university degree. So I chose Sega. [Laughs]

How are things different now that you're running your own independent studio? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages?

I don't really see any disadvantages. Initially, it was really hard putting together the team. That took a long time. But there are a lot of advantages. I feel a lot more freedom than I did recently at Sega. The way Prope is now feels really close to the old Sonic Team, when it was more independent. I really like that.

So it's sort of comparable to when Sonic Team was working on a lot of original properties like NiGHTS, Burning Rangers, etc.?

Yes. Back then we could develop those new intellectual properties with relatively small teams. But to create a Sonic game on the next-gen consoles, for instance, you need more and more developers. I wanted to get back to trying new ideas with smaller teams.

Quite a few developers in Japan have been setting up independent studios recently. Why do you think that is, and do you foresee that trend continuing?

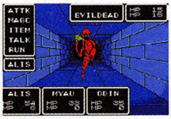
I think a lot of the famous creators have been doing it because they had bad relationships with their previous company. But that wasn't my motivation. I still have a good relationship with Sega. I think what happens is that a lot of those famous

GAMEOGRAPHY

What follows is but a small sampling of Naka's work. Needless to say, having one of the industry's greatest talents back in the development game is reason for celebration. According to Naka, Prope's next project will likely be a new character-action title.

HI-SCORE
SCORE
10
LOVE
MONEY
FLOWER
ROUND

GIRL'S GARDEN
1984, SG-1000
PROGRAMMER



PHANTASY STAR
1988, SEGA MASTER SYSTEM
MAIN PROGRAMMER

SCORE 200
TIME 0:23
RINGS 29
SONIC

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
1991, SEGA GENESIS
PROGRAMMER

SCORE 0
TIME 0:15
RINGS 17

SONIC & KNUCKLES
1994, SEGA GENESIS
PRODUCER, LEAD PROGRAMMER

NiGHTS INTO DREAMS
1996, SEGA SATURN
PRODUCER, LEAD PROGRAMMER

Power Profiles

creators get promoted until they can no longer actively work on whatever they want. I talked to Sega about this many times, and they offered me the opportunity to create a new company and work on new ideas independently. So I still have close ties with Sega. When I left the company, it was more like I graduated. The student received his diploma. [Laughs] The head of Sega told me that I could list "Sega Creative Fellow" on my business card.

What aspect of creating a video game do you enjoy the most?
After the concept stage, when you've actually solved the big problems and started working visually, that's the most exciting part for me. Also at that point, there's usually lots of really goofy-looking stuff in the game. I'd love to show it to the players in that condition—it's usually really funny.

You've worked in many different roles in the game-development process over the course of your career—programmer, director, producer, etc. Which is your favorite?
I like programmer best. Even now, I would love to do more programming. But if I focused on that, people might think I'm neglecting the other aspects of my job. They'll ask, "What the heck are you doing?" [Laughs] But yeah, I definitely still get the itch to program. Actually, last year, Sega was working on porting Fist of the North Star from Master System to Virtual Console in Japan. The producer on the project came across a bug that he couldn't fix, so he asked me to help since I originally programmed that game. I was able to find the bug just by looking at the code onscreen. [Laughs] I really enjoyed that!

When you're stumped by a particularly difficult problem while developing a game, what's your process for working through it?
I'll try to do something different; maybe take a little time to enjoy one of my hobbies. My main hobby is circuit racing. I've been doing that for about 10 years. Most people play golf, but I like to race. [Laughs]

What kind of car do you race?
A Lotus Elise and a Ferrari 360 Spider. I've done about 20 Ferrari races this year. I think I'm the person who knows the most about cars in the games industry. [Laughs] When I look at a racing game, I usually have a lot of comments that I'd like to make. [Laughs] Most of the time, the way the cars handle isn't very realistic. I want developers who create racing games to spend a lot of time at the circuits.

Looking back at your career, which of your games are you most proud of?
Sonic the Hedgehog.

> *"I feel a lot more freedom than I did recently at Sega. The way Prope is now feels really close to the old Sonic Team, when it was more independent."*

When you were working on the original Sonic, did you and your fellow team members have any idea that the character would go on to become such a huge phenomenon?
Actually, I did have a good feeling about it. But at the time, Sega of Japan wasn't so confident. There was one important person at Sega of America who was really interested in the game, though, so SoA worked pretty hard on the marketing campaign. That helped the game a lot. After that, I moved to Sega of America for a while.

Why do you think Sonic has struck a chord with so many gamers for so long?
I don't really know. That's why I was able to keep making Sonic games for such a long time, though, so I really appreciate it. And even though I'm at Prope now, I still get letters from kids about Sonic. That really motivates me to create better and better games.

How do you feel about longtime rivals Mario and Sonic finally teaming up in a couple of recent titles? And have you taken the opportunity to finally lay the smack down on Mario with Sonic in Super Smash Bros. Brawl?
[Laughs] Actually, I was the person who asked Sakurai-san to include Sonic [in Super Smash Bros. Brawl]. I wanted to have Sonic in the previous Smash Bros., but there wasn't enough time. But yeah, I'm really happy about having both of gaming's leading characters together in one game. It's kind of like a movie in which the villain and the hero finally team up at the end. In Japan, there's a saying: "Yesterday's enemy, today's friend."

What other game or game creators do you most admire or respect?
Miyamoto-san. I think he's the best developer in the world. His imagination and his way of thinking are amazing. I've learned a lot from him.

Whose works in other forms of media, such as film or literature, do you most admire or enjoy?
I love movies and stage shows. I particularly like Cirque du Soleil. As for my favorite directors, I would probably say Steven Spielberg, George Lucas, and Hayao Miyazaki.

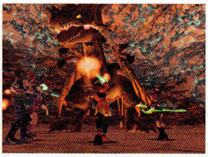
If you could have one superpower, what would it be and why?
I would want to be a wizard. That way, I don't have to choose just one power! [Laughs] Sorry, I'm greedy.

GAMEOGRAPHY

BURNING RANGERS
1998, SEGA SATURN
PRODUCER

SONIC ADVENTURE
1999, DREAMCAST
PRODUCER

CHUCHU ROCKET!
2000, DREAMCAST
PRODUCER, DIRECTOR



PHANTASY STAR ONLINE
2001, DREAMCAST
PRODUCER

BILLY HATCHER AND THE GIANT EGG
2003, GAMECUBE
PRODUCER

From Bowser to Zelda: Master all Brawl's fighters
The final set of exclusive guides in one easy place for better brawling
gr.

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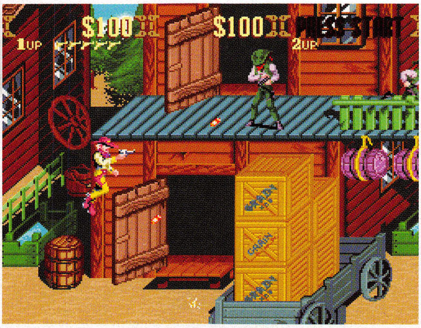
SUNSET RIDERS

SUNSET RIDERS
Nintendo
Swap lead with the same great game that blew you away in the arcade!
KONAMI
SUPER NINTENDO

Yee haw! These young guns were the best in the West.



It's a little-known fact that cowboys often wore brightly colored pastel outfits. Why else would they always be trying to shoot each other?

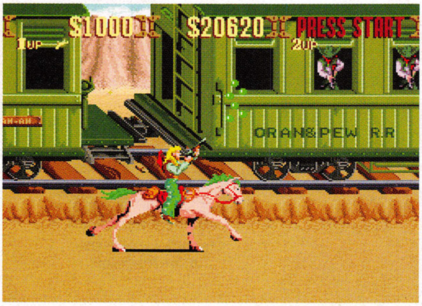
PLATFORM: SUPER NES
PUBLISHER: KONAMI
DEVELOPER: KONAMI
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 1993
COVERED IN ISSUES: 55, 65
RACIALLY INSENSITIVE BOSSES: 3

Back in the untamed 16-bit frontier, the West didn't get much wilder than it did in Sunset Riders. Originally a hit arcade game, Sunset Riders is somewhat comparable to Contra in the sense that both were 2-D run-and-gun shooters, but Riders possessed a style that was uniquely its own.

By harnessing the relatively untapped Old West setting, Konami provided a perfect excuse for you and a pardner to engage in intense shoot-first-ask-questions-later action. A more methodical pace, brightly colored graphics, and a tongue-in-cheek presentation further set the game apart from its contemporaries, as did the ability to select from four playable gunslingers. Whether you chose pistol-wielding Steve or Billy, or shotgun-equipped Bob or Cormano, your mission was the same: to make the Old West a safer place and earn a bundle of cash in the process.

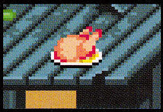
Eight stages, each featuring traditional Western set pieces, stood between the heroic bounty hunters and their dreams of fortune and glory. As you journeyed through frontier towns, climbed treacherous mountains, moseyed across the top of a moving train, and (in two of the stages) raced through the wilderness on horseback, you had to face a bevy of foes, including masked bandits, knife-toting thugs, dynamite-tossing madmen, and even stampeding cattle. Each level also featured a challenging boss at the end. One of the most notable aspects of the boss fights was that the bosses spoke digitized dialogue (fairly uncommon in the 16-bit days) before the battle and upon their defeat, enabling bad guys to truly speak their last words.

Although Sunset Riders featured several changes from its arcade cousin—the coin-op version supported four players, boasted better animation, and offered additional content in some levels—the Super NES adaptation still managed to deliver a very satisfying shoot-'em-up experience. Not a bad way to ride off into the sunset. **—CHRIS H.**



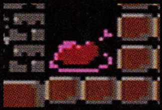
I'm a wanted man... especially by the ladies!

TASTES LIKE CHICKEN

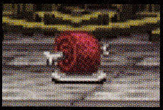


Delicious discarded foodstuffs have long been a staple of Japanese action games, and Sunset Riders is no exception. Unlike in the games shown below, however, collecting a conveniently placed chicken offers no special benefit in Sunset Riders, other than increasing your score and, presumably, satiating your hero's ravenous appetite. Shooting banditos works up a mean hunger!

Castlevania
When exploring a haunted castle, nothing keeps you going like an old roast found hidden in a wall. Mmm...merman-y!



Final Fight
If Final Fight taught us one thing, it's that you should elect a mayor who is willing to personally pile-drive criminals into the pavement. If it taught us a second thing, it's that punching over a trashcan and eating whatever's inside is the key to good health.



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REVIEWS

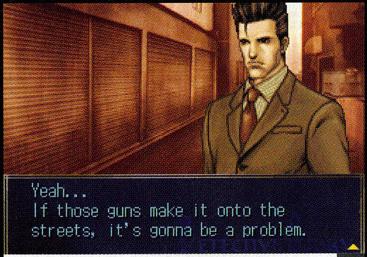
IN-DEPTH REVIEWS OF ALL THE LATEST GAMES

Does the first new **Punch-Out!!** game in 15 years throw a good punch or get KO'd?

PUNCH-OUT!! 88

UP 89

MAGICIAN'S QUEST: MYSTERIOUS TIMES 89



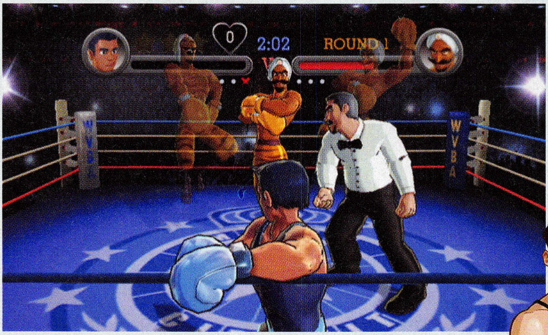
Yeah...
If those guns make it onto the streets, it's gonna be a problem.

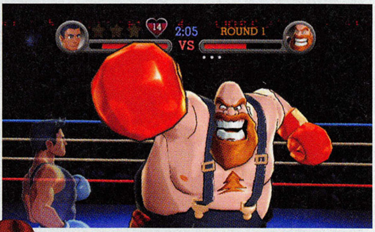
JAKE HUNTER DETECTIVE STORY: MEMORIES OF THE PAST 90

573/999
560/999
697/999

BLACK SIGIL: BLADE OF THE EXILED 90

Black Sigil: Blade of the Exiled 90
C.O.R.E. 90
Help Wanted 90
Jake Hunter Detective Story: Memories of the Past 90
Magician's Quest: Mysterious Times 89
Punch-Out!! 88
Up 89





Knockout Punch

PUNCH-OUT!!

RATING: **8.5**

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **NEXT LEVEL GAMES**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

For years Punch-Out!! was a series that I wistfully looked back upon with no confidence that another sequel would ever be made, so it feels strange to write a review for a game that I'd always considered a fantasy—strange, but incredibly rewarding. The folks at Next Level Games have created an amazing title that has made the 15 years since Super Punch-Out!! quite worthwhile. (And if I still feel like pining for a forgotten franchise, there's always Kid Icarus.)

Depending on your view, you could either find relief in the fact that the new installment for the Wii console is Punch-Out!! by the book, or you could complain that the series has barely changed since it began over two decades ago. I subscribe to the former opinion. While the game's main mode is essentially a 3-D redo of the NES classic (complete with almost all of the same characters), it's done incredibly well—and a back-to-basics approach seems an appropriate way to reintroduce the franchise to a new generation of players. (Make that *generations*, actually—today's high-school students were in diapers when Super Punch-Out!! came out.)

The first thing that a Punch-Out!! rookie needs to understand is that it isn't a boxing game—at least, not in the usual ways. As the developers of the Wii edition describe it (check out the interview on pg. 62), it's really a puzzle game. Little Mac (that's you) remains in a fixed position, and on defense he can only dodge, duck, or block incoming punches. You're given a similarly simple selection of offensive options: left and right punches that can be aimed high or low. This definitely isn't your usual fighting game with dozens of crazy attacks. But the defining genius of Punch-Out!! lies in the various ways that you are prompted to counter what your opponent is doing. Each character you face throws unique punches, with varied timing, that you must study and learn the correct response to. As your opponents stick to fairly predictable attack patterns, punches, dodges, counterpunches, and so on become a kind of dance between the two of you—make a wrong step, and you take a hit; keep the rhythm, and you can work the other guy's life bar down until he falls to the mat. Learning the patterns requires a fair amount of trial and error, and the process can be frustrating when you're getting pummeled and don't know what to do. But when you learn the right steps and can keep up the dance 'til the end, victory is immensely satisfying.

In addition to delivering the most polished, flashy presentation of Punch-Out!! to date (character animations are especially well done), Next Level snuck in a few sucker punches for longtime fans who may think they've already seen it all. Most notably, you can play the game by punching the air with the Wii Remote and Nunchuk controllers (with the Control Stick used to dodge, duck, and block). Shaking both controllers to stand after a fall can get tiring if you play for hours, but overall the motion controls work great. There's also a classic control option (you hold the Wii Remote sideways) where the buttons are mapped just as they were for the NES Punch-Out!! Furthermore, the developers have added new prematch fighter introductions and a useful training mode where you can practice against holograms of any boxer you've faced. Becoming the champ unlocks a Title Defense campaign in which you refight tougher versions of all the boxers you beat on your way to the top. A lot of effort was put into this mode; it's almost as good as getting a full new set of opponents, and greatly adds to the game's replay value. Similarly, each beaten boxer can be refought in Exhibition mode, which gives you new challenges to complete, such as finishing Von Kaiser with just five punches. I'm not as sold on the two-player versus mode (it's fun for a laugh but doesn't come close to the single-player experience) or the optional Wii Balance Board support, which presents a near-unworkable substitute for the speedier and more accurate standard defensive controls. In the end, none of the game's new elements have a dramatic impact on what is essentially still the same Punch-Out!! that fans know and love, but they are all welcome additions, nonetheless.

While the Punch-Out!! series doesn't, and never did, share the rarified air of Mario and Zelda (what does?), it is another blue-chip franchise in Nintendo's second tier of modern-day masterpieces. Here's hoping that Little Mac's next title run happens before today's toddlers head off to college. **—CHRIS SL.**

WRITERS' BLOCK

HOW SHOULD COMPANIES TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE NINTENDO DSi'S UNIQUE CAPABILITIES?

Justin Cheng

Now that you can put songs on an SD card, I'd like to see Nintendo DSi games—particularly rhythm games—support custom soundtracks.

Chris Hoffman

How cool would it be to take pictures of people with the camera and then map those people's faces onto custom characters? WWE, I'm looking at you!

Chris Shepperd

I'd like to be able to take pictures of places with the camera, and have the contours of those places immediately be transformed into levels of a platformer.

George Sinfield

I'd like to see a Pikmin game that uses objects that I photograph as the items that the little critters carry away.

Chris Slate

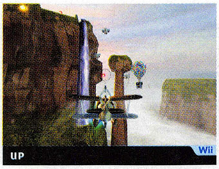
All I want is the chance to download old Game Boy games from the Nintendo DSi Shop. And while I'm dreaming, how about Game Boy Advance titles, too?

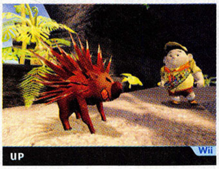
David F. Smith

Since the Nintendo DSi supports SD cards, I'd like to see Nintendo release a homebrew software-development kit—like Sony's old Net Yaroze project.

Steve Thomason

With the introduction of DSiWare, I'd love to see more retro-style sequels à la Mega Man 9. Give me a 16-bit Sonic the Hedgehog 4, Sega!



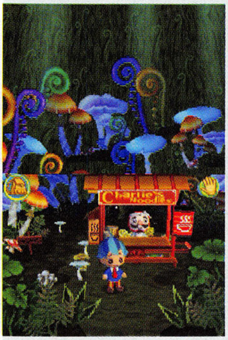


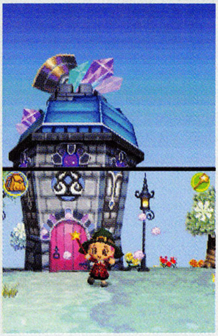
UP

RATING: 6.5

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **THQ**
DEVELOPER: **HEAVY IRON STUDIOS**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

We all know the reputation of licensed games (they tend to be... not so good). But Up—based upon the Pixar film—is fun, mainly because of its emphasis on cooperation. The game features three playable characters—the cane-wielding, balloon-animal-making codger, Carl; the bug-collecting, trumpet-playing boy, Russell; and a talking dog named Dug—and each has his own strengths that you have to utilize to progress. You can play by yourself and swap between them on the fly, but another player can drop in and start playing at any time. It's much more fun this way and gives Up a LEGO Star Wars/Indiana Jones/Batman feel. Plus, it means that you don't have to rely on the AI. (Having an AI partner who is too stupid to fend for himself and avoid hazards can become particularly annoying since the characters share one life meter.) Venturing through most of the 11 levels is entertaining thanks to a focus on solving puzzles over fighting baddies (even the boss battles are essentially big puzzles). In fact, I enjoyed these platforming and puzzle-solving parts of the game—which, thankfully, make up the majority of the less-than-five-hour-long adventure—more than the action-heavy biplane combat levels. **—JUSTIN C.**





Mystery Meet

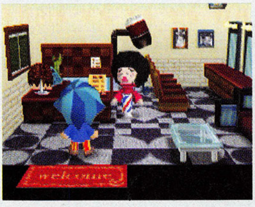
MAGICIAN'S QUEST: MYSTERIOUS TIMES

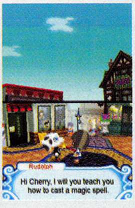
RATING: 7.5

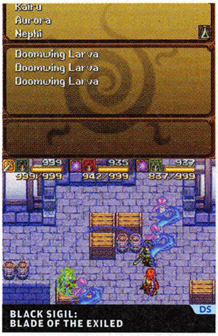
PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS**
PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **KONAMI**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Mysterious indeed, Konami's answer to Animal Crossing is a quirky life sim at a Hogwarts-esque magic academy. The art style and basic gameplay are comparable to those of Animal Crossing: Wild World. The primary activities are the predictable walking around town, speaking to inhabitants, attending classes (to learn magic), and accumulating items for your character's home (in this case, a dorm room at the school). The oddities begin with an obscure icon-based magic system that has you memorizing symbol sequences to conjure spells. Further, a mode called Mysterious Time turns night into day, cancels classes, and makes the town's odd inhabitants just a little odder; they all speak with indecipherable electronic chirps that are more disturbing than cute.

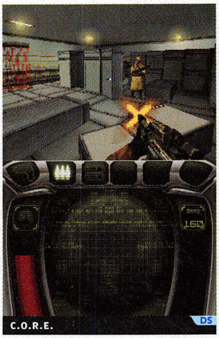
If you're looking for rules, goals, a way out of Mysterious Time, and obvious clues about the game's 52 weekly mysteries (one a week for a full calendar year) you will be frustrated by the title's lack of structure. You have to take a Zen approach to it; just explore, collect mushrooms and flowers, capture bugs with your wand-turned-net, and let things happen. By selling the right flora and fauna at the right times, you can make enough cash to deck out your room and your customizable character with 1,500 items, which is a lot of rugs, chairs, and bookshelves. If you've gotten your fill of Wild World and have a penchant for pointed hats and robes, you may fall under the spell of Mysterious Times. **—GEORGE S.**



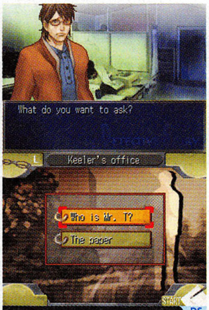




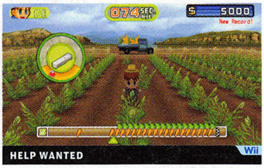
BLACK SIGIL:
BLADE OF THE EXILED



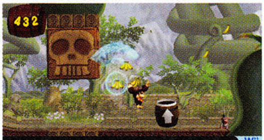
C.O.R.E.


What do you want to ask?

JAKE HUNTER DETECTIVE
STORY: MEMORIES OF THE PAST



HELP WANTED



NEW PLAY CONTROL!
DONKEY KONG JUNGLE BEAT

BLACK SIGIL: BLADE OF THE EXILED

RATING: 5.0

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS**
PUBLISHER: **GRAFFITI ENTERTAINMENT**
DEVELOPER: **STUDIO ARCHCRAFT**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

At first glance, you'd assume this game was made in Japan, and you'd be off by about 6,000 miles. Black Sigil was actually developed in Montreal by some folks who were clearly big fans of Chrono Trigger. This isn't quite an RPG to equal the classics, but it's not a bad first step. Black Sigil looks great in a 16-bit sort of way, and the soundtrack is beautiful. On the other hand, the story could stand to pick up a bit faster, and combat tends to be a chore. Random encounters happen too often, take too long, and involve too much sitting and waiting for the active-time gauge to fill up. Still, Studio Archcraft may have a great game for us someday. **—DAVID S.**

C.O.R.E.

RATING: 5.5

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS**
PUBLISHER: **GRAFFITI ENTERTAINMENT**
DEVELOPER: **NOWAY STUDIO**
ESRB: **MATURE**

In the year 2020, a meteor crashes to Earth, a team of galactic Marines must tend to what's been unleashed, and hopefully, Nintendo releases a new handheld. No offense to the mighty Nintendo DS system, but with Moon having just exhausted our remaining "An FPS on the DS! Wow!" enthusiasm, it's hard to see C.O.R.E. as anything other than a dull technical achievement awaiting the next hardware generation.

It's incredibly short and repetitious, and somehow finds a way to make gray corridors even grayer. And while C.O.R.E. may boast a solid frame rate and functional controls, that hardly matters when the difficulty is so erratic. Many enemies return unavoidable fire, leading to an archaic FPS experience that's ultimately more about memorization than marksmanship. An impressive feat, yet still a genre better represented elsewhere. **—CHRIS A.**

JAKE HUNTER DETECTIVE STORY: MEMORIES OF THE PAST

RATING: 6.0

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS**
PUBLISHER: **AKSYS GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **WORKJAM**
ESRB: **TEEN**

The first mystery that Jake Hunter needs to solve is the case of his game's missing personality. Granted, the localization of point-and-click crime adventure Jake Hunter Detective Story: Memories of the Past is far livelier than that of the first Jake Hunter game—the writing is good, with hints of brilliance—but the characters and cases throughout the bulk of the game fall pretty flat. A lot of the events are predictable, and when unexpected twists do occur, there's rarely any sense of drama. There's also very little in the way of item use or compelling touch-screen functionality to make the stories interesting, and the problem is compounded by the fact that there's no risk involved—you can't lose. Though the title contains a lot of gameplay, five of the game's six episodes are decidedly mediocre; the sixth, however, is quite good—perhaps because it tells its story from multiple viewpoints and focuses on characters other than Jake himself. Additionally, the wacky Jake Hunter Unleashed bonus episodes take steps in the right direction. They're extremely short, but their quirky, irreverent style and superdeformed art provides some much-needed character, and the fact that you can actually be defeated in these bite-sized cases makes them more intriguing than their straight-laced counterparts. The game features a lot of nice bonus content, too. If every aspect of the title were as well polished, Jake Hunter Detective Story would be a must-play; as it is, this hard-boiled detective is a bit underdone. **—CHRIS H.**

HELP WANTED

RATING: 4.5

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **HUDSON**
DEVELOPER: **HUDSON**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

The latest Wii minigame collection, Help Wanted attempts to stand out from the crowd by wrapping its activities in a charmingly bizarre premise. A meteor is headed toward Earth, you see, and the only way to stop it is by working a bunch of temp jobs and using your earnings to purchase assorted meteor-smashing gizmos from the home shopping network. Oh, and after you've destroyed the meteor, you'll have to stop such other celestial threats as a giant bowl of ramen, and disco.

Unfortunately, the minigames themselves aren't nearly as extraordinary as the setup. There are a couple of standouts, but the vast majority is some combination of awkward, tedious, and frustrating. Times are tough, but this is one job offer you should pass up. **—STEVE T.**

ALSO THIS MONTH

If you missed the GameCube version (and maybe even if you didn't), be sure to check out Nintendo's **New Play Control! Donkey Kong Jungle Beat**. Ironically, the addition of Wii controls makes the platformer more traditional than the original (which was controlled by bongos), since you now move with the Control Stick and attack by shaking the Wii Remote and Nunchuk, and it's arguably more fun. There's plenty of level variety, and now there are new obstacles to overcome. The boss fights are cool, too.... The humor in Majesco's **Night at the Museum: Battle of the Smithsonian: The Video Game** for Wii falls a bit flat, but a variety of interesting powers makes the game more than a typical movie-based platformer.... Naruto is older and wiser in Tomy's **Naruto Shippuden: Ninja Council 4** for DS. The game structure has improved considerably over previous games in the series.... SNK Playmore's **Samurai Shodown Anthology** for Wii delivers six arcade-perfect games in one convenient package. It's a must-have for fighting fans.

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[REVIEWS ARCHIVE]

To the Nines

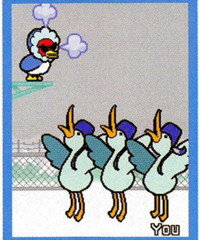
There were a lot of high-scoring games last issue: Klonoa for Wii and Rhythm Heaven, Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars, and Pokémon Platinum Version for the Nintendo DS all got 9.0s, and Excitebots: Trick Racing got an 8.0. That's almost too many great games to play! Now we just need to set aside some spare time to play all of these titles.

SCORES REFLECT INDIVIDUAL REVIEWERS' OPINIONS.
• INDICATES WI-FI COMPATIBLE

Wii

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
AC/DC Live: Rock Band Track Pack	N/A	MTV Games	237	T
Alone in the Dark	4.0	Atari	232	M
• Animal Crossing: City Folk	8.0	Nintendo	236	E
Backyard Baseball '09	N/A	Atari	231	E
Boogie SuperStar	7.0	Electronic Arts	235	E10+
Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars—The Director's Cut	7.0	Ubisoft	241	T
Brothers in Arms: Double Time	7.0	Ubisoft	235	M
• Call of Duty: World at War	8.0	Activision	237	M
• Castlevania Judgment	7.0	Konami	236	T
Cate West: The Vanishing Files	N/A	Destineer	240	E10+
Celebrity Sports Showdown	4.5	EA Sports	235	E
Cooking Mama World Kitchen	6.5	Majesco	236	E
Crash: Mind over Mutant	N/A	Activision	235	E10+
Dance Dance Revolution Hottest Party 2	8.0	Konami	234	E10+
de Blob	8.0	THQ	234	E
Dead Rising: Chop Till You Drop	N/A	Capcom	240	M
Deadly Creatures	7.5	THQ	239	T
Dokapon Kingdom	8.5	Atlus	235	E10+
Don King Boxing	5.5	2K Sports	241	T
• Excitebots: Trick Racing	8.0	Nintendo	241	E
FaceBreaker K.O. Party	5.0	Electronic Arts	235	T
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	7.5	System 3	233	E
FIFA Soccer 09 All-Play	7.5	Electronic Arts	235	E
• Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time	6.0	Square Enix	240	E10+
Final Fantasy Fables: Chocobo's Dungeon	7.5	Square Enix	231	E10+
• Fishing Master: World Tour	7.5	Hudson	238	E
Guilty Gear XX Accent Core Plus	7.5	Aksys	241	T
• Guitar Hero Aerosmith	7.0	RedOctane	232	T
• Guitar Hero Metallica	N/A	Activision	240	T
• Guitar Hero World Tour	8.5	Activision	236	T
Harvest Moon: Tree of Tranquility	6.5	Natsume	233	E
The House of the Dead: Overkill	8.0	Sega	239	M
The Incredible Hulk	3.5	Sega	231	T
The King of Fighters: The Orochi Saga	8.0	SNK Playmore	235	T
Klonoa	9.0	Namco Bandai	241	E10+
Kung Fu Panda: Legendary Warriors	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
The Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
LEGO Batman: The Videogame	7.0	Warner Bros.	235	E10+
Line Rider 2: Unbound	5.0	Inxile	234	E
Little League World Series Baseball 2008	N/A	Activision	232	E
Lost in Blue: Shipwrecked	6.5	Konami	235	E10+
Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
• Madden NFL 09 All-Play	9.0	Electronic Arts	232	E
MadWorld	9.0	Sega	240	M
Major League Baseball 2K9	6.0	2K Sports	240	E
Major Minor's Majestic March	6.0	Majesco	241	E
• Marble Saga: Kororinpa	7.5	Hudson	240	E
Mario Super Sluggers	7.5	Nintendo	233	E
MLB Power Pros 2008	7.0	2K Sports	232	E
Monster Lab	6.5	Eidos	236	E10+
MotoGP	4.0	Capcom	240	E
Mushroom Men: The Spore Wars	8.0	Gamecock	236	E10+
MySims Kingdom	7.5	Electronic Arts	235	E
MySims Party	5.0	Electronic Arts	240	E
Naruto: Clash of Ninja Revolution 2	8.0	Tomy	235	T
NASCAR Kart Racing	6.0	EA Sports	238	E
• NBA Live 09 All-Play	4.0	Electronic Arts	234	E
NCAA Football 09 All-Play	5.0	Electronic Arts	232	E
Need for Speed Undercover	6.5	Electronic Arts	236	T
Neighborhood Games	N/A	THQ	238	E
Neopets Puzzle Adventure	N/A	Capcom	236	E
New Play Control! Mario Power Tennis	N/A	Nintendo	239	E
New Play Control! Pikmin	N/A	Nintendo	239	E
NHL 2K9	7.0	2K Sports	234	E10+
Onechanbara: Bikini Zombie Slayers	6.5	D3Publisher	240	M
Order Up!	7.0	Zoo Games	232	E
Pop Star Guitar	N/A	XS Games	236	T
Pro Evolution Soccer 2009	N/A	Konami	240	E
• Quantum of Solace	5.0	Activision	237	T
Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party	5.5	Ubisoft	236	E10+
Ready 2 Rumble Revolution	5.0	Atari	240	T
Rock Band	8.0	MTV Games	231	T
• Rock Band 2	9.0	MTV Games	237	T
Rock Band Track Pack Volume 1	6.5	MTV Games	232	T
Rock Band Track Pack Volume 2	N/A	MTV Games	237	T
Rock Revolution	4.5	Konami	235	T
Rubik's World	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E
Rune Factory Frontier	7.5	Marvelous Entertainment USA/XSEED	240	E10+
Rygar: The Battle of Argus	7.0	Tecmo	236	T
Sam & Max Season One	7.0	The Adventure Company	233	T
• Samba de Amigo	9.0	Sega	234	E
Shaun White Snowboarding: Road Trip	7.0	Ubisoft	236	E10+
SimAnimals	N/A	Electronic Arts	238	E
SimCity Creator	6.0	Electronic Arts	234	E
Skate It	6.0	Electronic Arts	237	E
SNK Arcade Classics Vol. 1	8.5	SNK Playmore	233	T
Sonic and the Black Knight	8.0	Sega	239	E10+
Sonic Unleashed	8.0	Sega	236	E10+
Space Chimps	N/A	Brash	231	E10+
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	6.5	Activision	236	T
SPRay	3.0	Tecmo	235	E10+
Star Wars The Clone Wars: Lightsaber Duels	4.0	LucasArts	236	T
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	7.5	LucasArts	233	T
Tales of Symphonia: Dawn of the New World	8.0	Namco Bandai	236	T
Tenchu: Shadow Assassins	7.0	Ubisoft	238	M
• Tiger Woods PGA Tour All-Play	8.5	Electronic Arts	233	E
TNA Impact!	5.0	Midway	235	T
Tomb Raider Underworld	7.0	Eidos	236	T
Ultimate Band	6.0	Disney	235	E
Ultimate Shooting Collection	N/A	UFO	237	E
WALL*E	N/A	THQ	231	E
Wario Land: Shake It!	8.0	Nintendo	234	E
We Cheer	6.0	Namco Bandai	235	E10+
• We Love Golf!	8.5	Capcom	231	E10+
We Ski and Snowboard	6.5	Namco Bandai	239	E
• Wii Music	N/A	Nintendo	235	E
WordJong Party	N/A	Destineer	238	E
• WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	8.0	THQ	236	T

REVIEWER NOTES

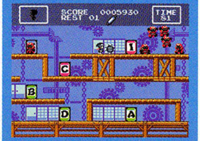


RHYTHM HEAVEN

Don't be one of the unfortunate people who never gives this game a try. Deeper than they first might seem, the varied games in Rhythm Heaven are pure, distilled fun. This, for my money, is the best music game out there. —CHRIS I.

GRAND THEFT AUTO: CHINATOWN WARS

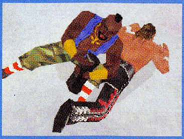
The more I play Chinatown Wars, the more I appreciate it. The game looks great in motion and has all the stuff mature players could want from a GTA title. —JUSTIN C.



RETRO GAME CHALLENGE

If you have any warm, fuzzy feelings about 8-bit gaming, Retro Game Challenge is a must-play. True, it doesn't contain any actual retro games, but the faux classics found here are in some ways better than the titles they're inspired by. There are plenty of in-jokes for longtime gamers, and a wide variety of genres (shooting, platforming, racing, RPG, etc.) are represented. —CHRIS H.

NINTENDO DS				
Age of Empires: Mythologies	7.0	THQ	236	E10+
Avalon Code	8.5	Marvelous Entertainment USA/XSEED	240	E10+
AWAY: Shuffle Dungeon	7.0	Majesco	235	E10+
Bangai-O Spirits	8.0	D3PA	232	E10+
Big Bang Mini	8.5	SouthPeak	237	E
Bleach: Dark Souls	8.5	Sega	234	T
Blue Dragon Plus	8.0	Ignition	239	E
Boing! Docomodake DS	7.0	Ignition	239	E
Brain Quest Grades 3 & 4	N/A	Electronic Arts	235	E
Brain Quest Grades 5 & 6	N/A	Electronic Arts	235	E
Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templar—The Director's Cut	N/A	Ubisoft	240	T
• Call of Duty: World at War	N/A	Activision	236	T
Carnival Games	4.5	2K Games	231	E
• Castlevania: Order of Ecclesia	8.0	Konami	235	T
The Chase: Felix Meets Felicity	5.0	Atari	238	E
Chrono Trigger	9.0	Square Enix	236	E10+
Civilization Revolution	7.5	2K Games	231	E10+
Crash: Mind over Mutant	N/A	Activision	235	E
The Dark Spire	5.0	Atlus	241	E10+
Disgaea DS	7.5	NIS America	233	T
Dokapon Journey	4.0	Atlus	241	E10+
Don King Boxing	N/A	2K Sports	240	T
Dragon Ball: Origins	7.0	Atari	235	E
Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen	7.5	Square Enix	233	E10+
Dragon Quest V: Hand of the Heavenly Bride	8.5	Square Enix	239	E
Drawn to Life: SpongeBob Squarepants Edition	7.0	THQ	234	E
Elebits: The Adventures of Kai and Zero	7.0	Konami	237	E
Emergency! Disaster Rescue Squad	N/A	Destineer	240	E10+
Exit DS	7.5	Square Enix	234	E
Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli	6.0	System 3	233	E
• Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Echoes of Time	6.5	Square Enix	240	E10+
Final Fantasy IV	9.0	Square Enix	231	E10+
• Fire Emblem: Shadow Dragon	8.5	Nintendo	239	E10+
Flower, Sun, and Rain	6.0	Marvelous Entertainment USA/XSEED	240	T
Gardening Mama	8.0	Majesco	240	E
Gauntlet	7.5	Eidos	236	T
• Grand Theft Auto: Chinatown Wars	9.0	Rockstar	241	M
Guitar Hero On Tour	8.0	Activision	232	E10+
Guitar Hero On Tour: Decades	7.0	Activision	237	E10+
Harvest Moon: Island of Happiness	7.0	Natsume	231	E
Henry Hatsworth in the Puzzling Adventure	8.0	Electronic Arts	240	E
The Incredible Hulk	7.5	Sega	231	E10+
Izuna 2: The Unemployed Ninja Returns	5.0	Atlus	232	T
Kirby Super Star Ultra	9.0	Nintendo	234	E
Kung Fu Panda: Legendary Warriors	N/A	Activision	236	E10+
Legacy of Ys: Books I & II	7.5	Atlus	238	T
The Legend of Kage 2	8.0	Square Enix	234	E10+
The Legend of Spyro: Dawn of the Dragon	N/A	Activision	236	E
LEGO Batman: The Videogame	7.5	Warner Bros.	235	E10+
Line Rider 2: Unbound	6.0	Inxile	234	E
Little League World Series Baseball 2008	N/A	Activision	232	E
Little Red Riding Hood's Zombie BBQ	5.0	Destineer	235	T
Lock's Quest	7.0	THQ	234	E
The Lord of the Rings: Conquest	5.0	Electronic Arts	238	E10+
Luminous Arc 2	7.0	Atlus	236	T
Lux-Pain	4.0	Ignition	240	T
Madagascar: Escape 2 Africa	N/A	Activision	236	E
Madden NFL 09	N/A	Electronic Arts	232	E
Master of the Monster Lair	6.5	Atlus	235	E10+
Metal Slug 7	7.5	Ignition	236	T
Monster Lab	8.0	Eidos	236	E10+
Moon	7.5	Mastiff	236	T
The Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor	N/A	Vivendi Games	231	T
Mushroom Men: Rise of the Fungi	5.0	Gamecock	236	E
My DoItAll	N/A	Tomy	239	E
My World, My Way	7.0	Atlus	239	E
MySims Party	N/A	Electronic Arts	240	E
Mystery Case Files: MillionHeir	6.5	Nintendo	234	E
Nancy Drew: The Mystery of the Clue Bender Society	N/A	Majesco	232	E10+
• Naruto: Path of the Ninja 2	6.5	Tomy	234	E10+
Neopets Puzzle Adventure	6.0	Capcom	236	E
• New International Track and Field	8.0	Konami	232	E10+
Ninjatown	8.0	SouthPeak	235	E
Peggle Dual Shot	8.5	PopCap	240	E
Personal Trainer: Cooking	N/A	Nintendo	237	E
Personal Trainer: Math	N/A	Nintendo	239	E
• Pokémon Platinum Version	9.0	Nintendo	241	E
• Pokémon Ranger: Shadows of Almia	8.0	Nintendo	236	E
Pop Cutie! Street Fashion Simulation	6.0	Koei	233	E
Populous	7.0	XSEED	234	T
• Prey the Stars	5.5	Koei	234	E10
Prince of Persia: The Fallen King	7.0	Ubisoft	237	E
Princess on Ice	N/A	Aksys	235	E
Puzzle Quest: Galactrix	8.0	D3Publisher	240	E10+
Quantum of Solace	6.0	Activision	237	T
Rayman Raving Rabbids TV Party	N/A	Ubisoft	236	E10+
Retro Game Challenge	8.0	XSEED	237	RP
Rhythm Heaven	9.0	Nintendo	241	E
Robocalypse	7.5	Tecmo	235	E10+
Rock Revolution	5.0	Konami	235	E10+
Rubik's World	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E
Rune Factory 2: A Fantasy Harvest Moon	7.0	Natsume	237	E
Shaun the Sheep	4.0	D3Publisher	235	E
Shaun White Snowboarding	N/A	Ubisoft	236	E
SimAnimals	N/A	Electronic Arts	238	E
• Skate It	5.5	Electronic Arts	237	E
Sonic Chronicles: The Dark Brotherhood	8.0	Sega	234	E
Space Chimps	N/A	Brash	231	E
• Spectrobes: Beyond the Portals	8.0	Disney	235	E10+
Spider-Man: Web of Shadows	N/A	Activision	235	E10+
Spore Creatures	8.0	Electronic Arts	234	E
Star Wars The Clone Wars: Jedi Alliance	6.0	LucasArts	236	E
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed	6.0	LucasArts	233	T
Steal Princess	6.0	Atlus	241	E10+
Suikoden: Tierkreis	7.0	Konami	240	E10+
Super Robot Taisen OG Saga: Endless Frontier	7.0	Atlus	241	T
• Tecmo Bowl: Kickoff	6.0	Tecmo	235	E
Theresia	N/A	Aksys	235	M
Time Hollow	7.0	Konami	234	T
Tokyo Beat Down	6.0	Atlus	240	T
• Tom Clancy's EndWar	N/A	Ubisoft	236	T
Tomb Raider Underworld	N/A	Eidos	236	T
Tony Hawk's Motion	4.0	Activision	237	E
Tornado	6.0	Ignition	234	E
Touch Mechanic	5.0	Aspyr	241	E
TrackMania DS	7.0	Atlus	240	E
Transformers Animated: The Game	7.0	Activision	235	E
Trauma Center: Under the Knife 2	8.5	Atlus	231	T
Unsolved Crimes	4.5	Empire	234	T
Valkyrie Profile: Covenant of the Plume	9.0	Square Enix	240	T
• Viva Piñata: Pocket Paradise	7.0	THQ	234	E
WALL*E	N/A	THQ	231	E
What's Cooking? Jamie Oliver	N/A	Atari	235	E
World Championship Games	N/A	The Game Factory	240	E
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009	4.0	THQ	236	T
Zenses: Oceans	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E
Zenses: Rainforest	N/A	The Game Factory	236	E
Zubo	6.5	Electronic Arts	240	E10+



WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2009 (DS)

The DS version of SmackDown vs. Raw could have been really good if it featured conventional button-based controls. Unfortunately, grappling—arguably the most important part of the game—via the touch screen just isn't very responsive. It's too bad, because the game has plenty of characters and match types, and it's impressive visually. **—CHRIS H.**

KLONOA

If you enjoy being happy, I implore you to pick up Klonoa. It's one of the all-time great platformers, and this Wii remake is absolutely stunning. Don't be afraid of that charming exterior—embrace it. **—STEVE T.**

GUITAR HERO METALLICA

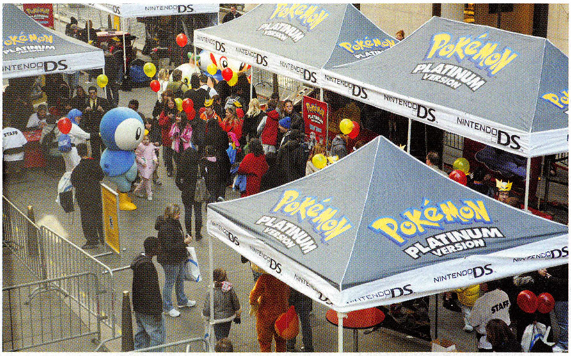
Imagine Guitar Hero World Tour with a Metallica-heavy track list, and you've got Guitar Hero Metallica. There's the full band experience, the character and music creation, and the online stuff—pretty much everything you could want (assuming you're a Metallica fan, of course; if you hate the band, this certainly won't change your mind). I kind of wish the game had a Guitar Hero Aerosmith-style story mode, though. **—JUSTIN C.**

EVENT

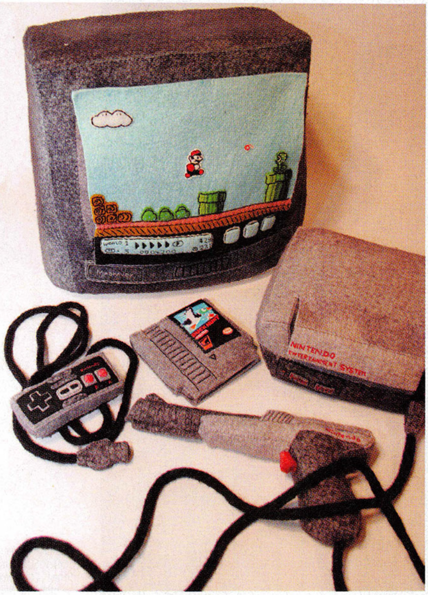
Platinum Party

Fans celebrate the release of **Pokémon Platinum Version** at the Nintendo World store in NYC.

On March 21, Pokémon fans got a chance to celebrate Pokémon Platinum Version's launch at the Nintendo World store in New York City with a four-hour party that included Pokémon Trading Card Game demos, Pokémon cosplayers, interactive game demos, and a screening of the latest Pokémon movie, *Pokémon: Giratina and the Sky Warrior.* Some fans who came in costume got the chance to dive into a vat of balls to try to nab a special edition Giratina DS Lite or free copies of Pokémon Platinum Version signed by the game's Producer, Junichi Masuda, and Director, Takeshi Kawachimaru of GAME FREAK inc. As you can see, fun was had by all. **—TOM H.**



[Above] Hundreds of Pokémon fans gather at the Nintendo World store in New York City.



FANDOM

Fuzzy Memories

We don't know whether to play or hug this plush NES.

Blythe Church has a knack for re-creating vintage items and electronics in felt, including cameras, boom boxes, and clock radios, but our hands-down favorite is her elaborate Nintendo Entertainment System setup. We would've been impressed by a simple felt NES console, but Church spared no detail in this project, creating an "interactive" setup with multiple cartridges and accessories, not to mention a felt television with swappable screen images for each title.

"You can change the screens from Super Mario Bros. to Duck Hunt, the controller and Zapper gun can be unplugged and interchanged, and the games can be removed and switched," explains Church.

The 27-year-old constructed this amazing craft by hand-dyeing and cutting the wool felt, hand-embroidering the various details, and filling each item with toy stuffing and cardboard to maintain their shapes. For the cartridge labels, Church drew the images on clear vinyl and sewed them into the felt. At one point, the NES was on display at a gallery in Church's native Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, and she says that those who have had a chance to "try out" the system have had some interesting reactions. "I have really enjoyed watching people 'play' my Nintendo, especially when they make sound effects," she exclaims.

Church has been sewing since she was very young, and has been doing these types of projects for about three years. The NES remains her favorite system, and she claims that she is "definitely addicted to Dr. Mario." Growing up, she primarily played the original Game Boy, and she hopes to revisit her beloved handheld via a felt rendition somewhere down the line. Might we suggest a bright red Virtual Boy, as well? —**ANDREW H.**

ABOVE *and* BEYOND

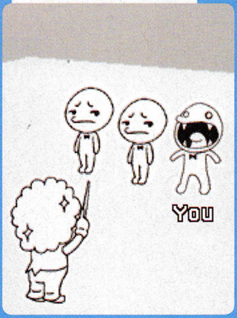
Got art, cosplay, case mods, etc.? Send them to us via email to **community@nintendopower.com** or via snail mail to Nintendo Power/Community c/o Future US, 4000 Shoreline Court, Suite 400, South San Francisco, CA 94080. We'll run the best stuff in this section.

WRITE YOUR OWN CAPTION

Screen Test

Admittedly, Volume 240's WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2009 screen was rather disturbing, but it did result in a wide variety of responses, as you can see by checking out some of the readers' captions below. This month, we feel the rhythm. If you feel it, too, send a caption to **screentest@nintendopower.com.**

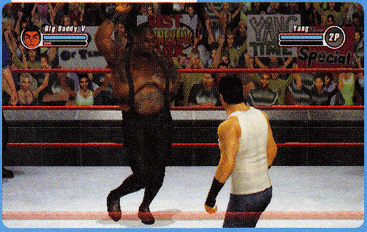
THIS MONTH'S SHOT



Evidently there's no YOU in team, either.

HERE'S OUR CAPTION. **THINK YOU CAN DO BETTER?**

VOLUME 240'S SHOT



"Yang begins to turn blind as Big Daddy V does the Dance of Terror in his direction." —**HENNELJACK**

"Wow, Mr. T, you really let yourself go!" —**MIKE V.**

"Aw, come on! I raised my hand and they still won't let me go the bathroom!" —**MICHAEL L.**

"Hey, check out my new deodorant. Keeps me dry even while in the ring!" —**VIVI O.**

"Big Daddy V's obsession with Dancing with the Stars suddenly paid off for him." —**ANDRES M.**

NEXT MONTH

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No teases or sly hints about next month's cover game, because we know how long many of you have been waiting for our big story on Kingdom Hearts 358/2 Days for DS. We'll also reveal a couple of cool Wii surprises and review big-name games like The Conduit and Indiana Jones and the Staff of Kings—all in just 30 short days!

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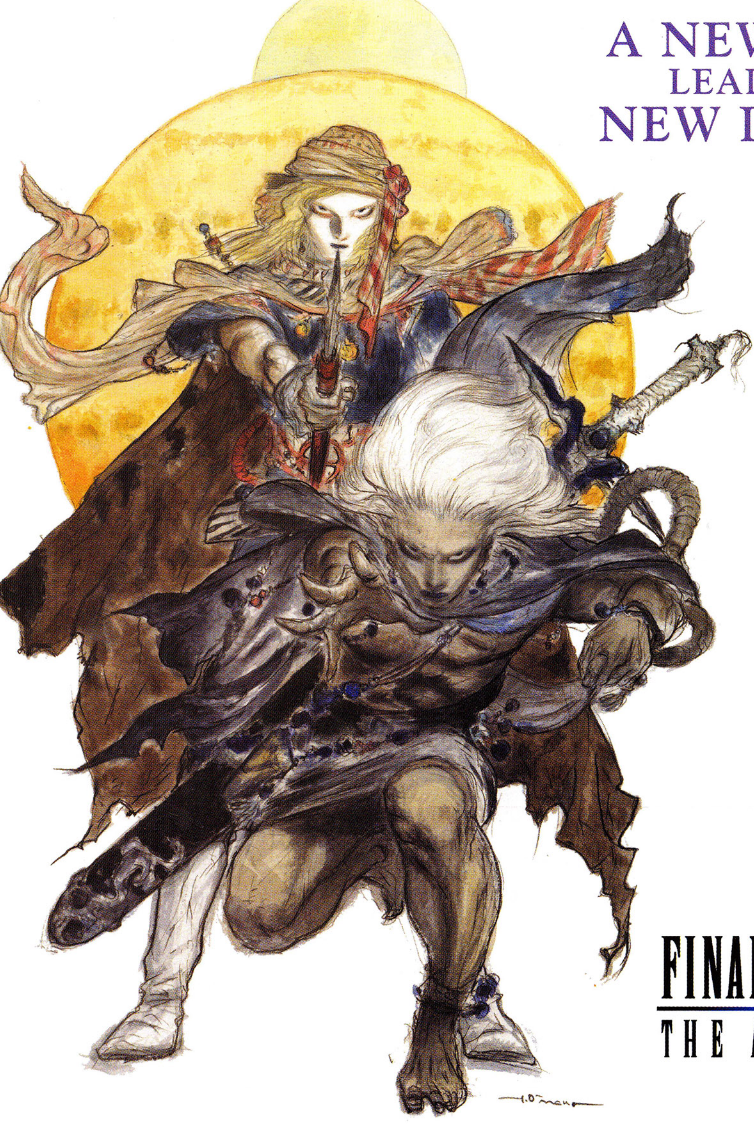
A NEW MOON
LEADS TO A
NEW DESTINY



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